



Certificate of Grant of Patent

DA

Patent Number: GB2365182

Proprietor(s): Socket Communications Inc

Inventor(s): Kevin J Mills
Michael L Gifford

This is to Certify that, in accordance with the Patents Act 1977,

a Patent has been granted to the proprietor(s) for an invention entitled
**"High-density removable expansion module having I/O and
second-level removable expansion memory"** disclosed in an application
filed 9 May 2000.

Dated 11 February 2004



Ron Marchant
Comptroller General of Patents,
Designs and Trade Marks
UNITED KINGDOM PATENT OFFICE

The attention of the proprietor(s) is drawn to the important notes overleaf.



(12) UK Patent (19) GB (11) 2 365 182 (13) B

(45) Date of publication: 11.02.2004

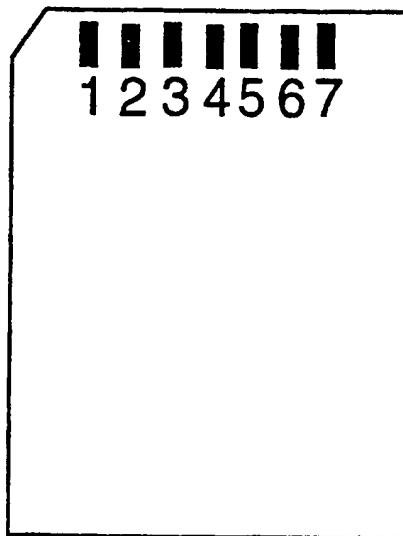
(54) Title of the invention: High-density removable expansion module having I/O and second-level removable expansion memory

(51) Int Cl⁷: G06F 3/00 13/00, H05K 5/00 7/00

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|--|------------|---|
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| (22) Date of Filing: | 09.05.2000 | (73) Proprietor(s): Socket Communications Inc (Incorporated in USA - Delaware) 37400 Central Court, Newark, CA 94560-3444, United States of America |
| (30) Priority Data: (31) 09309373 (32) 11.05.1999 (33) US (31) 09439966 (32) 12.11.1999 (33) US | | (74) Agent and/or Address for Service: Gill Jennings & Every Broadgate House, 7 Eldon Street, LONDON, EC2M 7LH, United Kingdom |
| (86) International Application Data: PCT/US2000/012796 En 09.05.2000 | | |
| (87) International Publication Data: WO2000/068770 En 16.11.2000 | | |
| (43) Date A Publication: | 13.02.2002 | |
| (52) UK CL (Edition W): G4A AMX | | |
| (56) Documents Cited: EP 0775964 A2 JP 100302030 A US 6053748 A US 5928347 A US 5615344 A US 5611055 A US 5184282 A | | |
| (58) Field of Search: As for published application 2365182 A <i>viz</i> : Other: US 710/1-2,100-102; 361/679-686 ONLINE:STN, WEST 2.0 updated as appropriate | | |
| Additional Fields UK CL (Edition V) G4A INT CL ⁷ G06F Other: ONLINE: WPI, EPODOC, PAJ | | |

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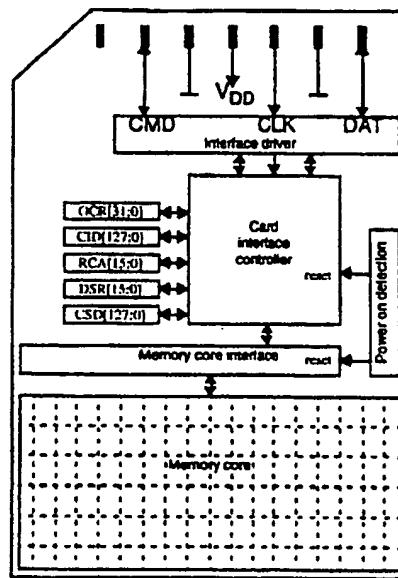
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Legend

| Pin No. | Name | Type | Description |
|---------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|
| 1 | RSV | NC | Reserved for future use |
| 2 | CMD | I/O/PP/OD | Command/Response |
| 3 | V_{SS1} | S | Supply voltage ground |
| 4 | V_{DD} | S | Supply voltage |
| 5 | CLK | I | Clock |
| 6 | V_{SS2} | S | Supply voltage ground |
| 7 | DAT | VO/PP | Data |

Figure 1
(Prior Art)



Legend

| Name | Width | Description |
|------|-------|---|
| CID | 128 | Card identification number, card individual number for identification. Mandatory. |
| RCA | 16 | Relative card address, local system address of a card, dynamically assigned by the host during initialization. Mandatory. |
| DSR | 16 | Driver stage register to configure the card's output drivers. Optional. |
| CSD | 128 | Card specific data, information about the card operation conditions. Mandatory |
| OCR | 32 | Operation condition register for cards which do not support the full voltage range. Used by a special broadcast command to detect restricted cards. Optional. |

Figure 2
(Prior Art)

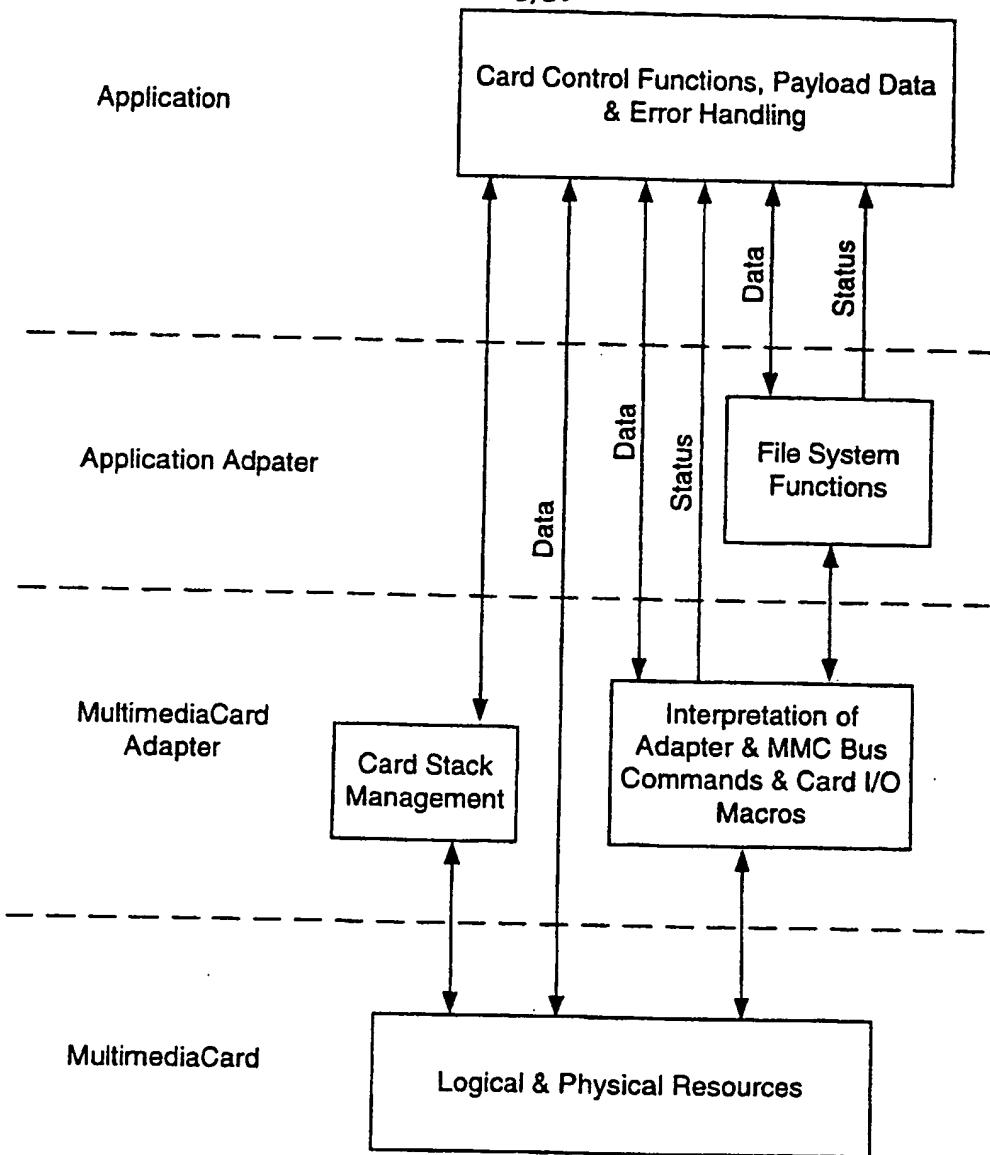


Figure 3
(Prior Art)

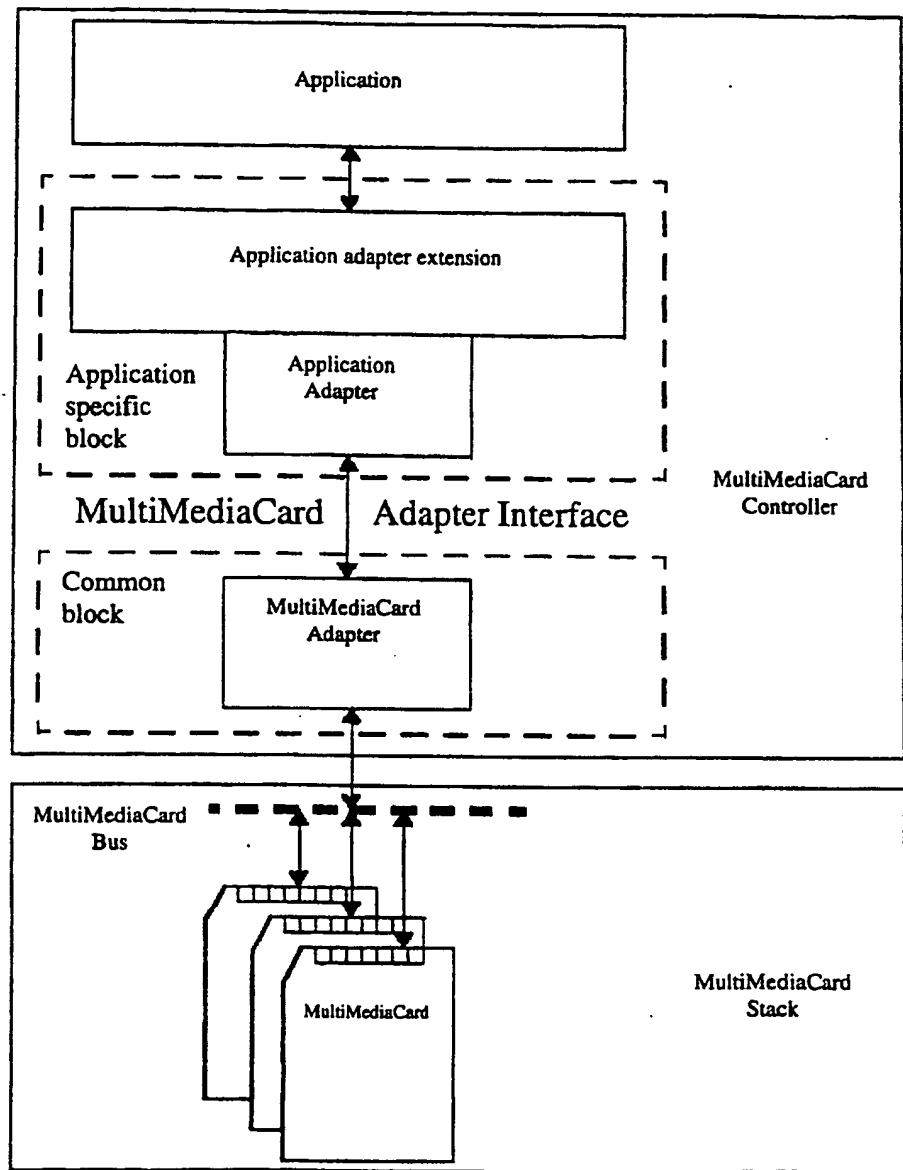


Figure 4
(Prior Art)

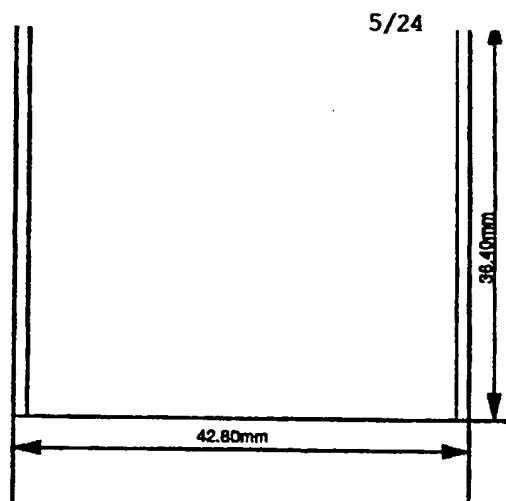


Figure 5A
(Prior Art)

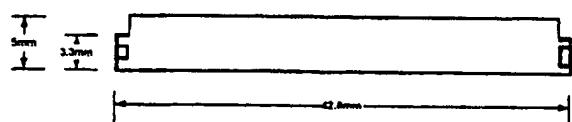


Figure 5B
(Prior Art)

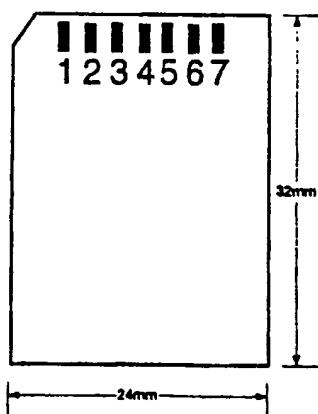


Figure 6A
(Prior Art)

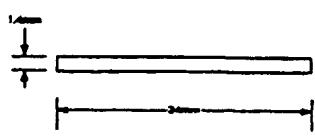


Figure 6B
(Prior Art)

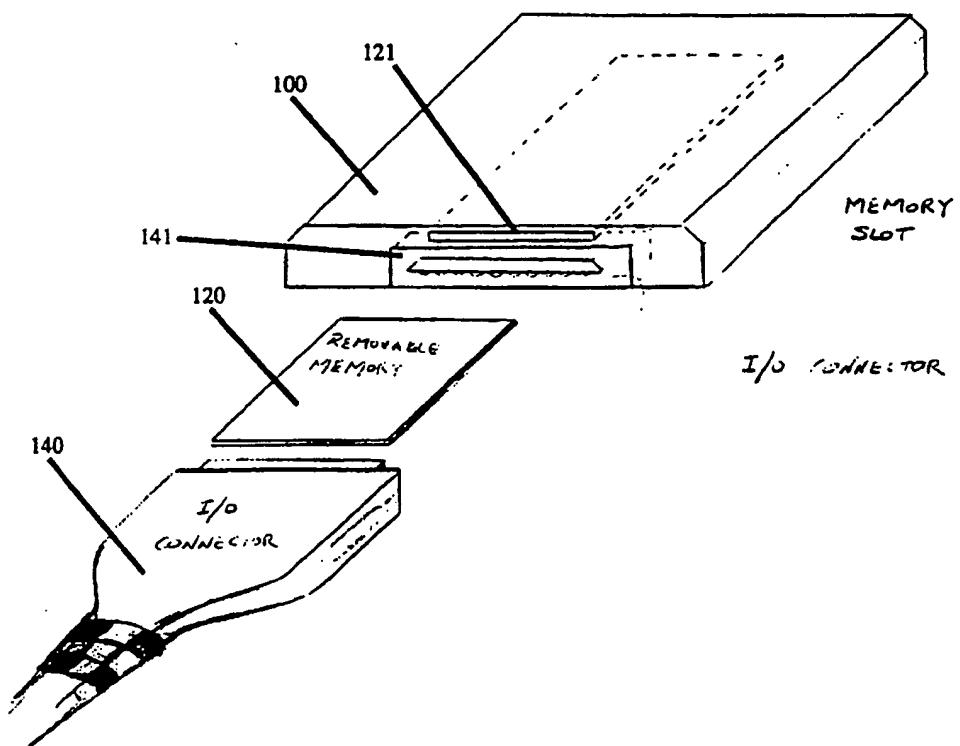


Figure 7

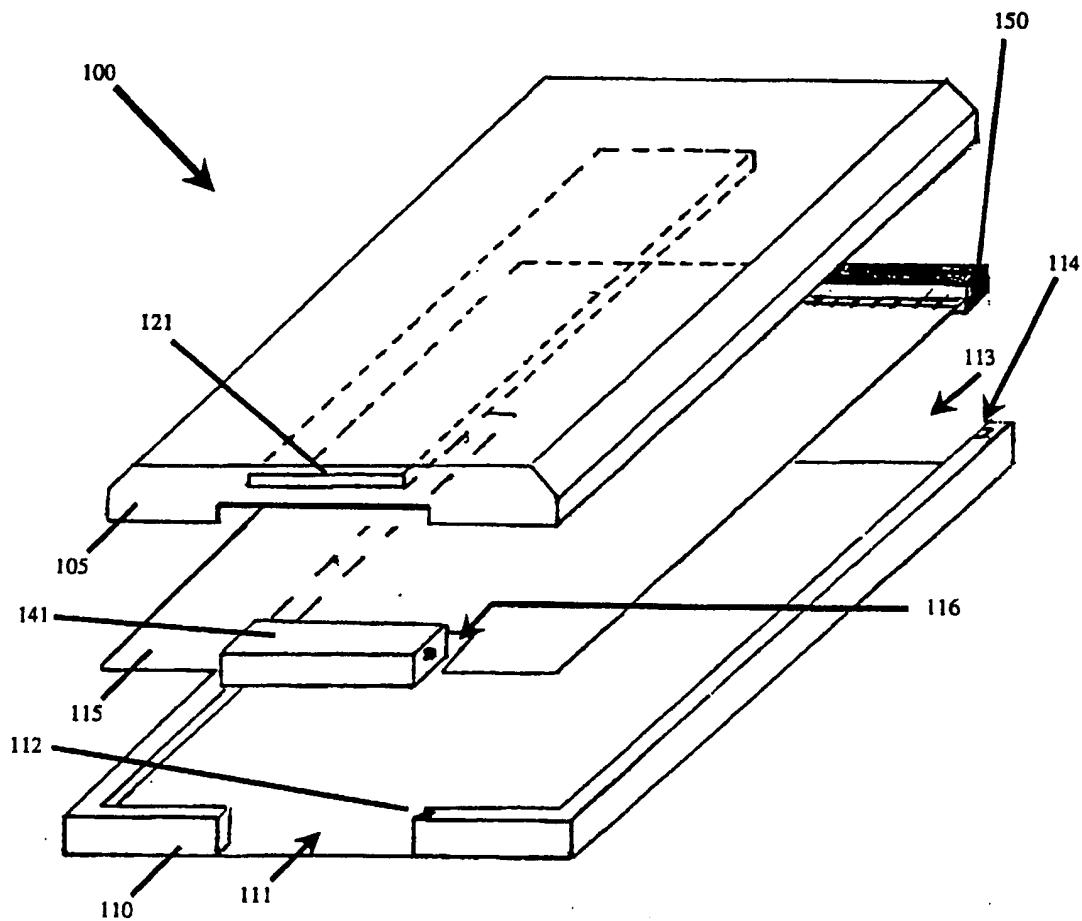


Figure 8

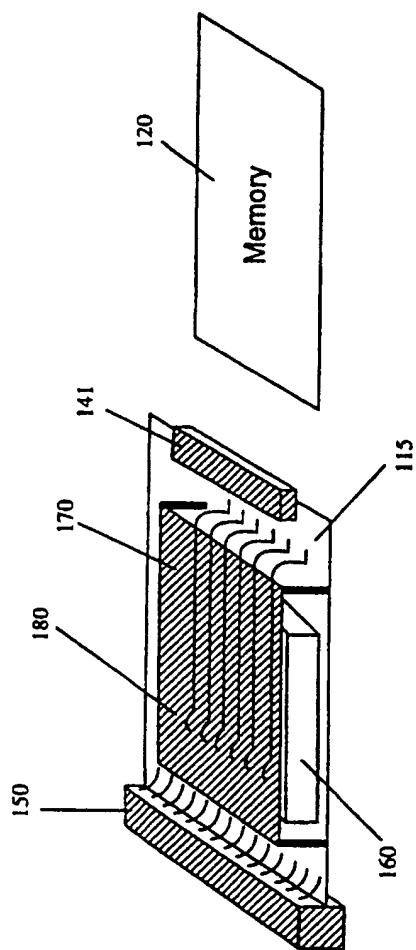


Figure 9

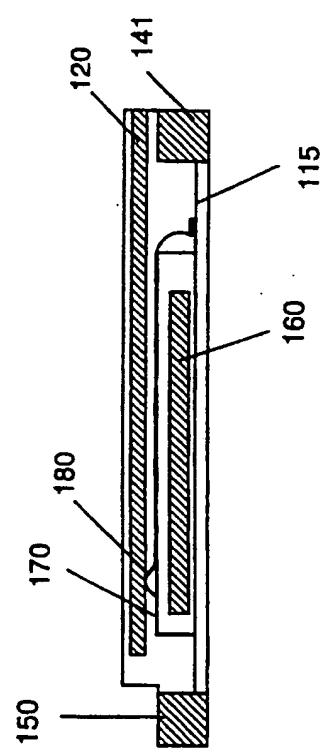


Figure 10

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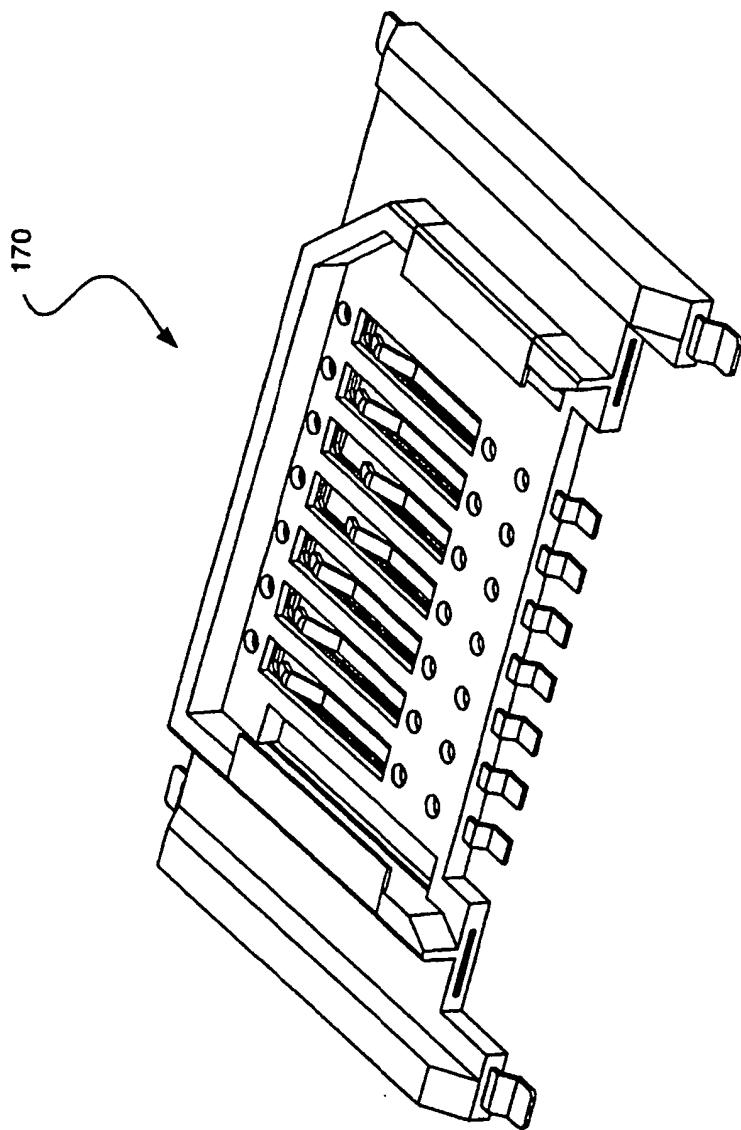


Figure 11

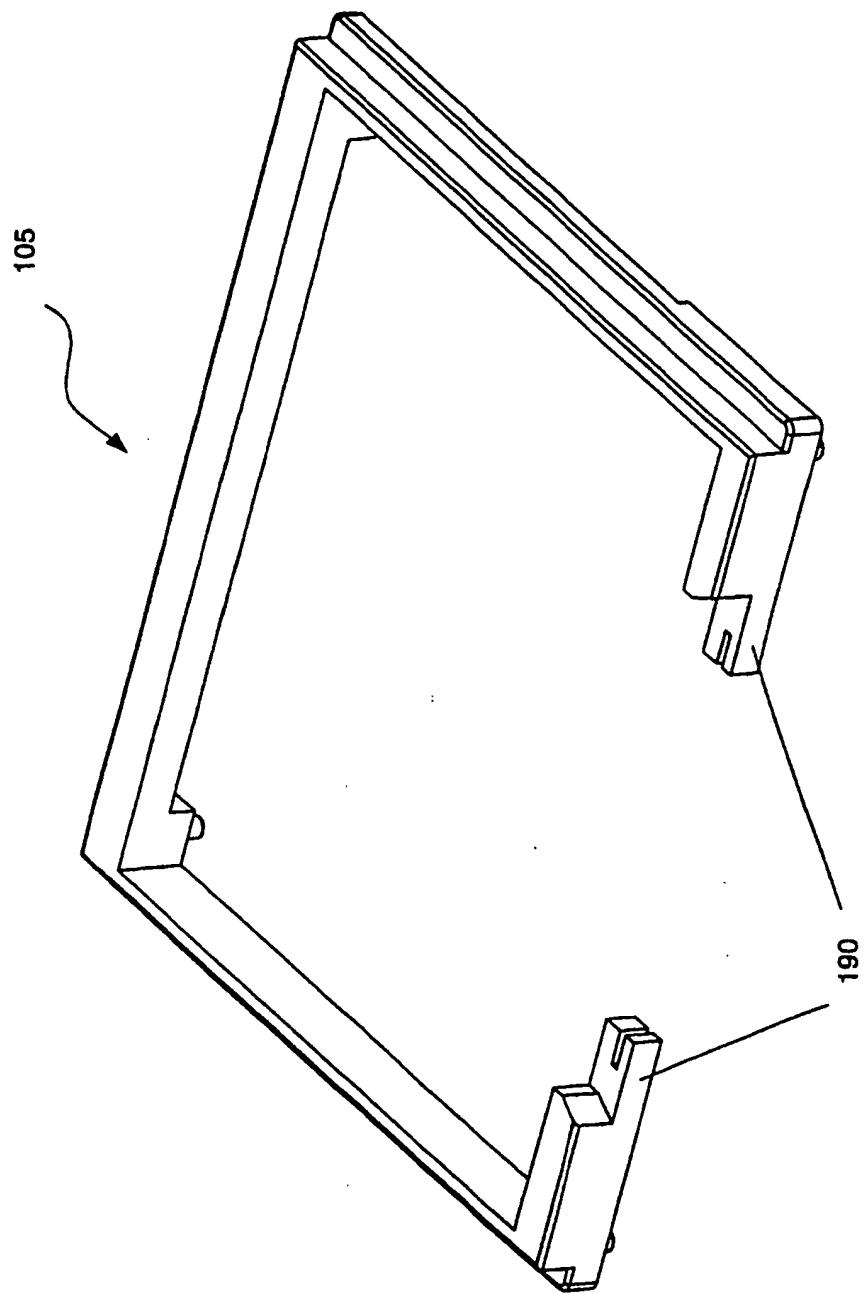


Figure 12

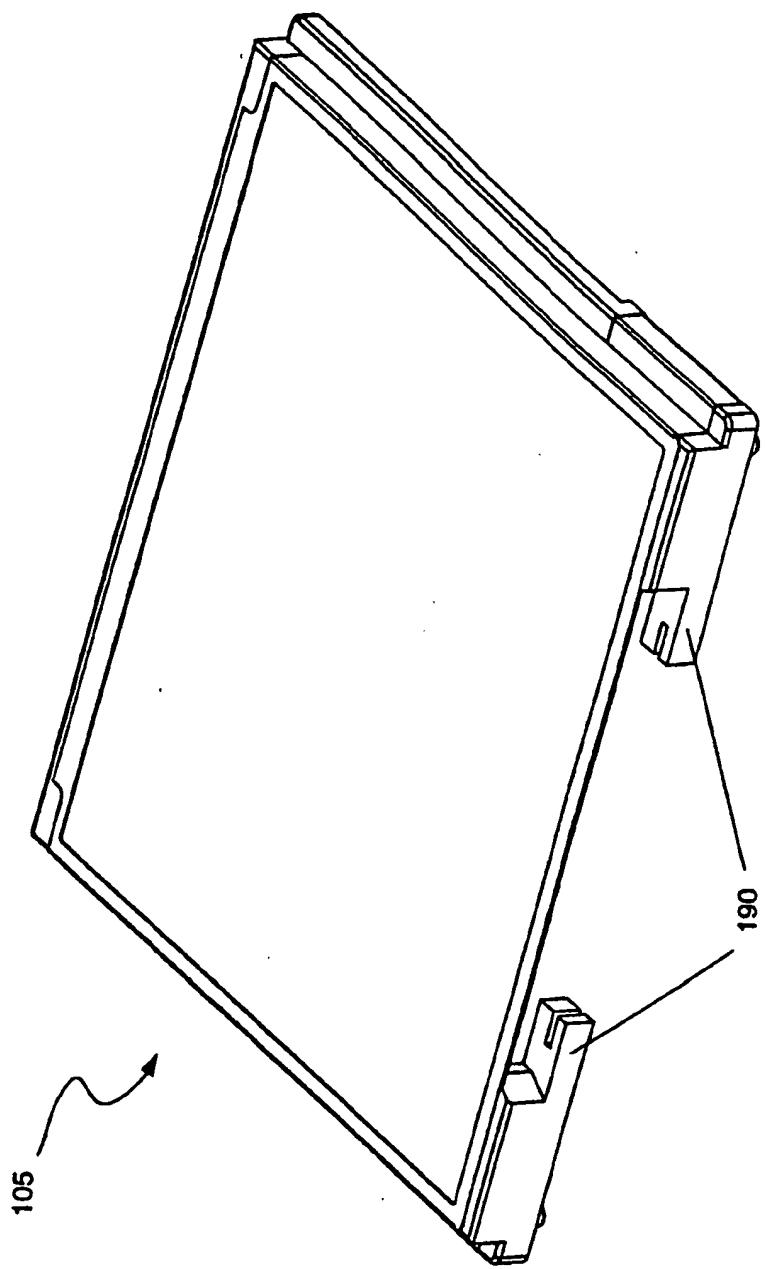


Figure 13

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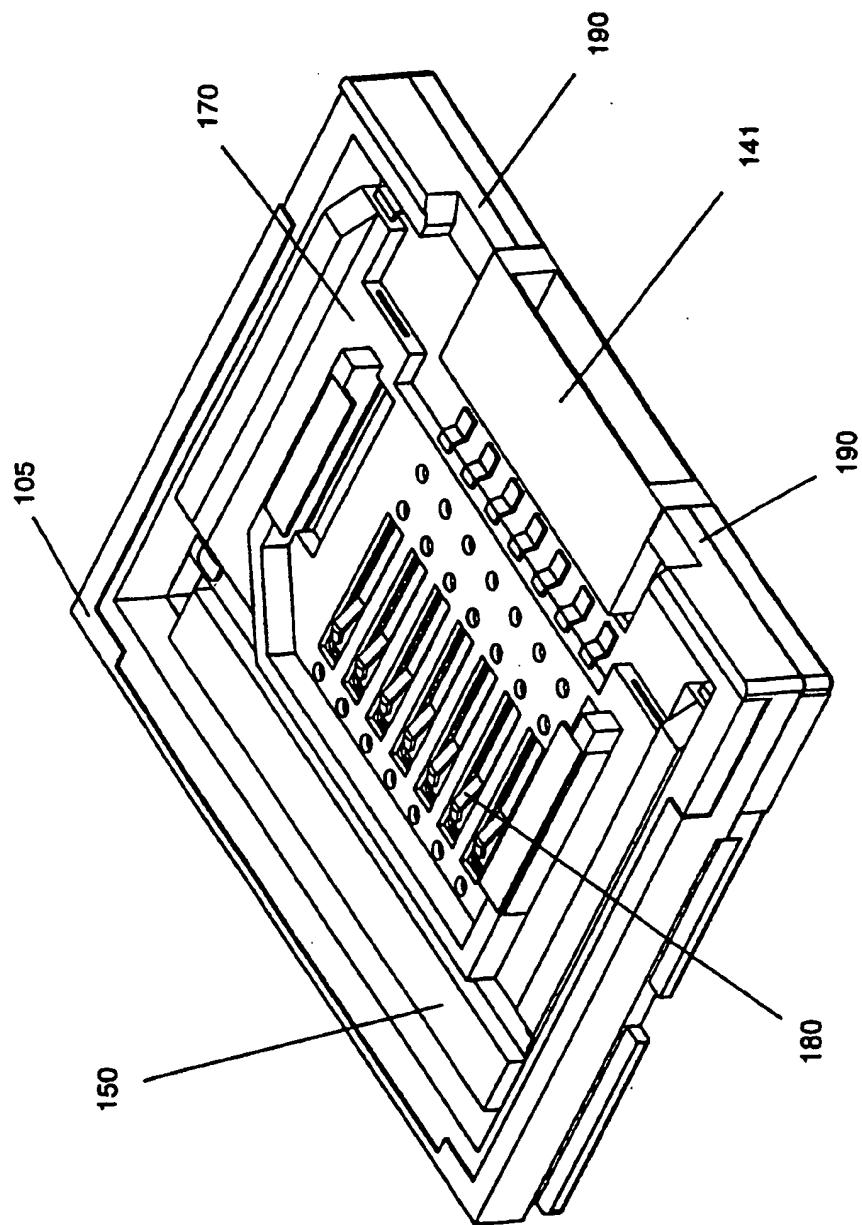


Figure 14

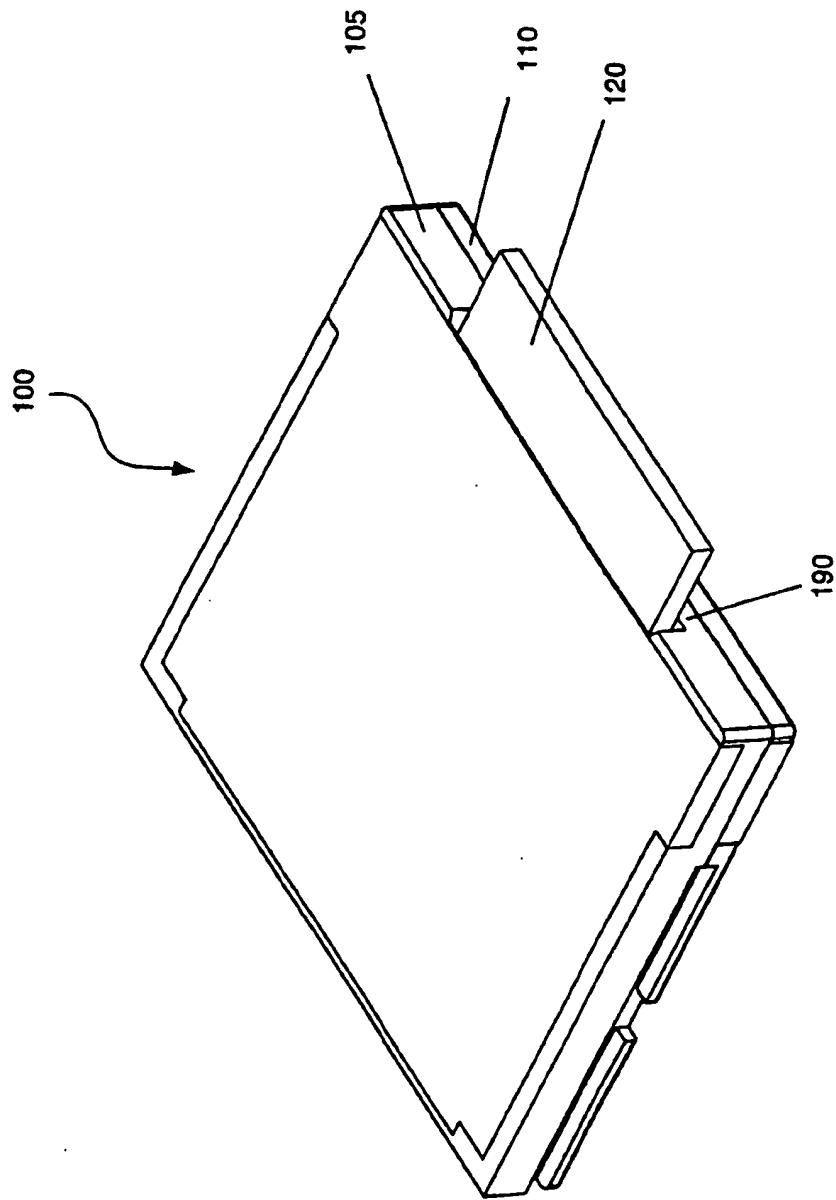


Figure 15

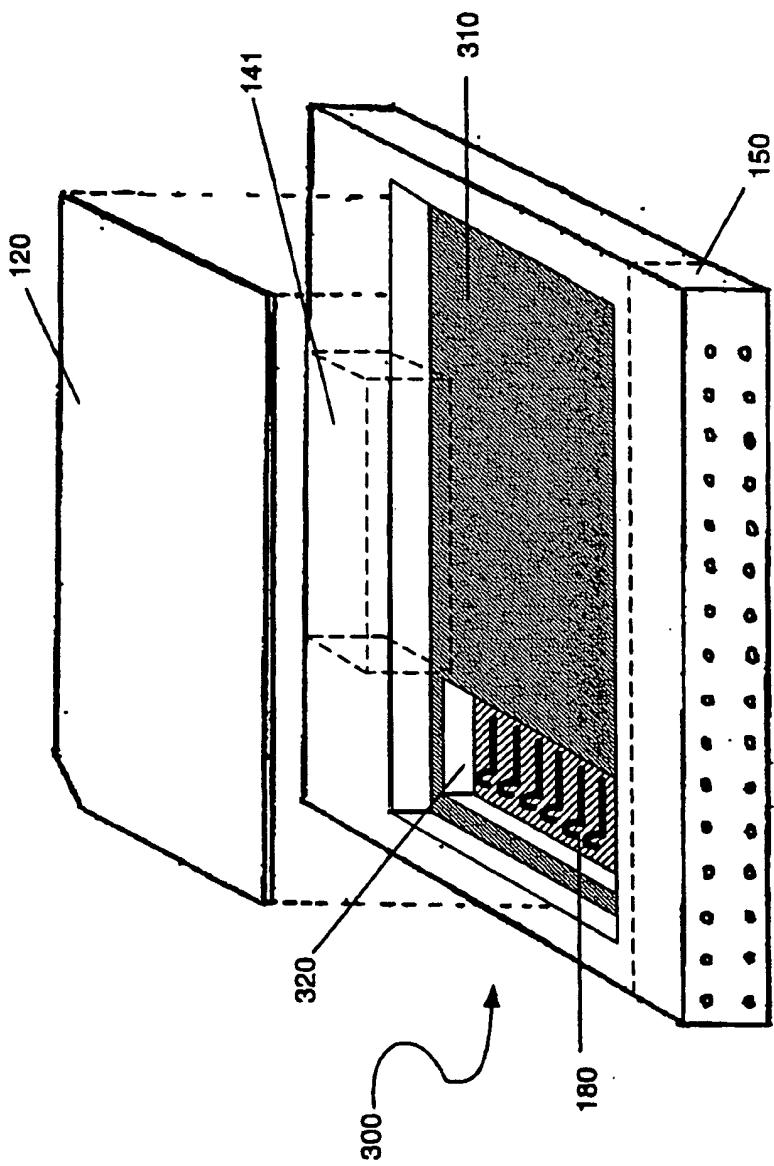


Fig. 16

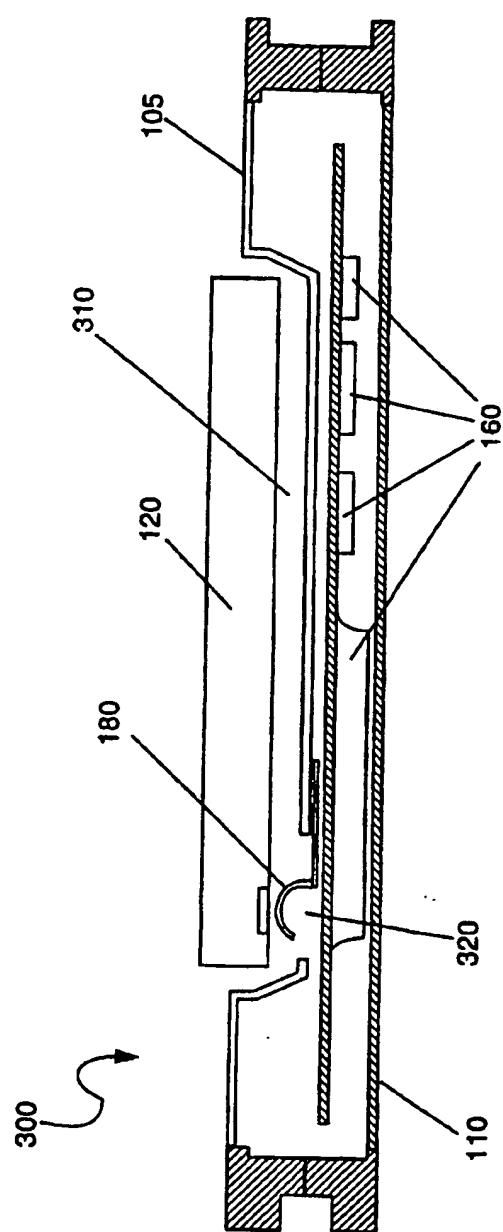


Fig. 17

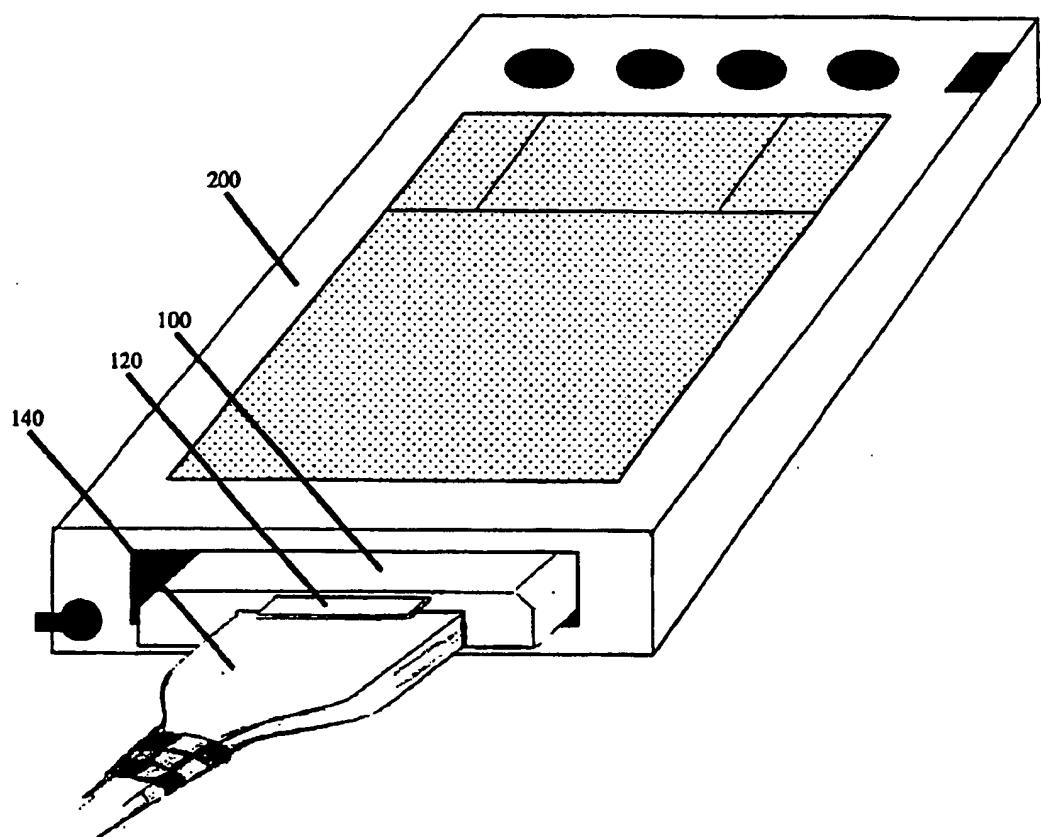


Figure 18

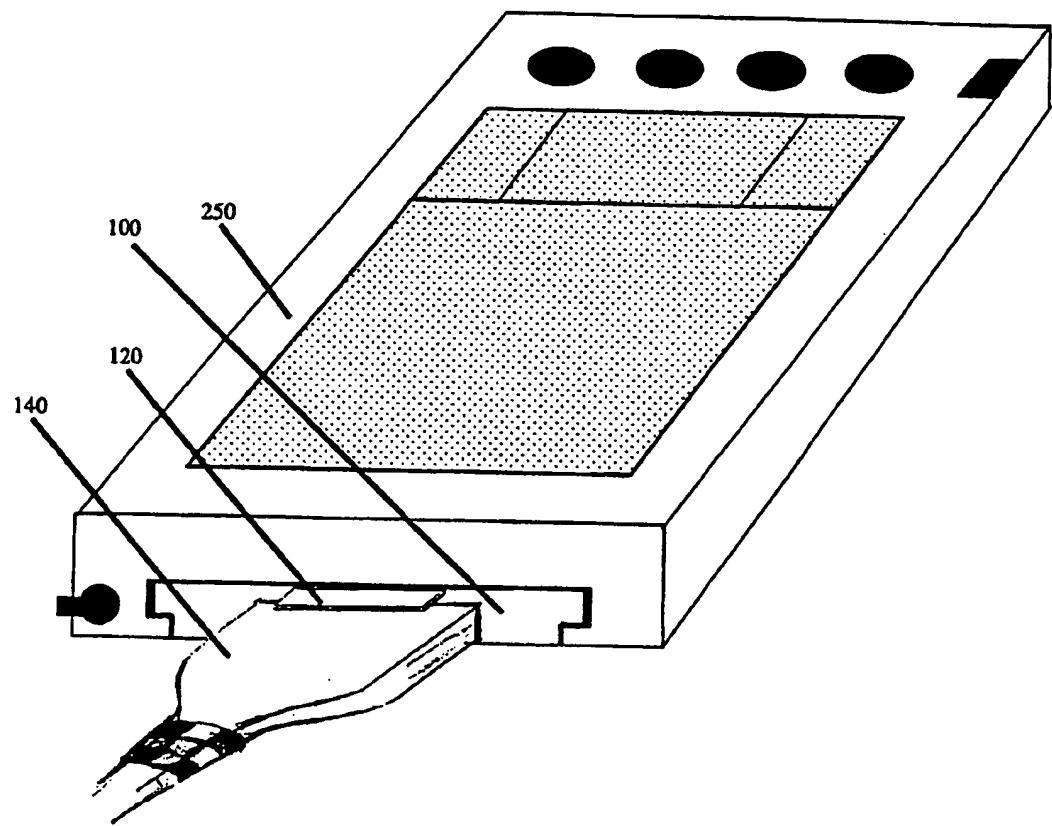


Fig. 19

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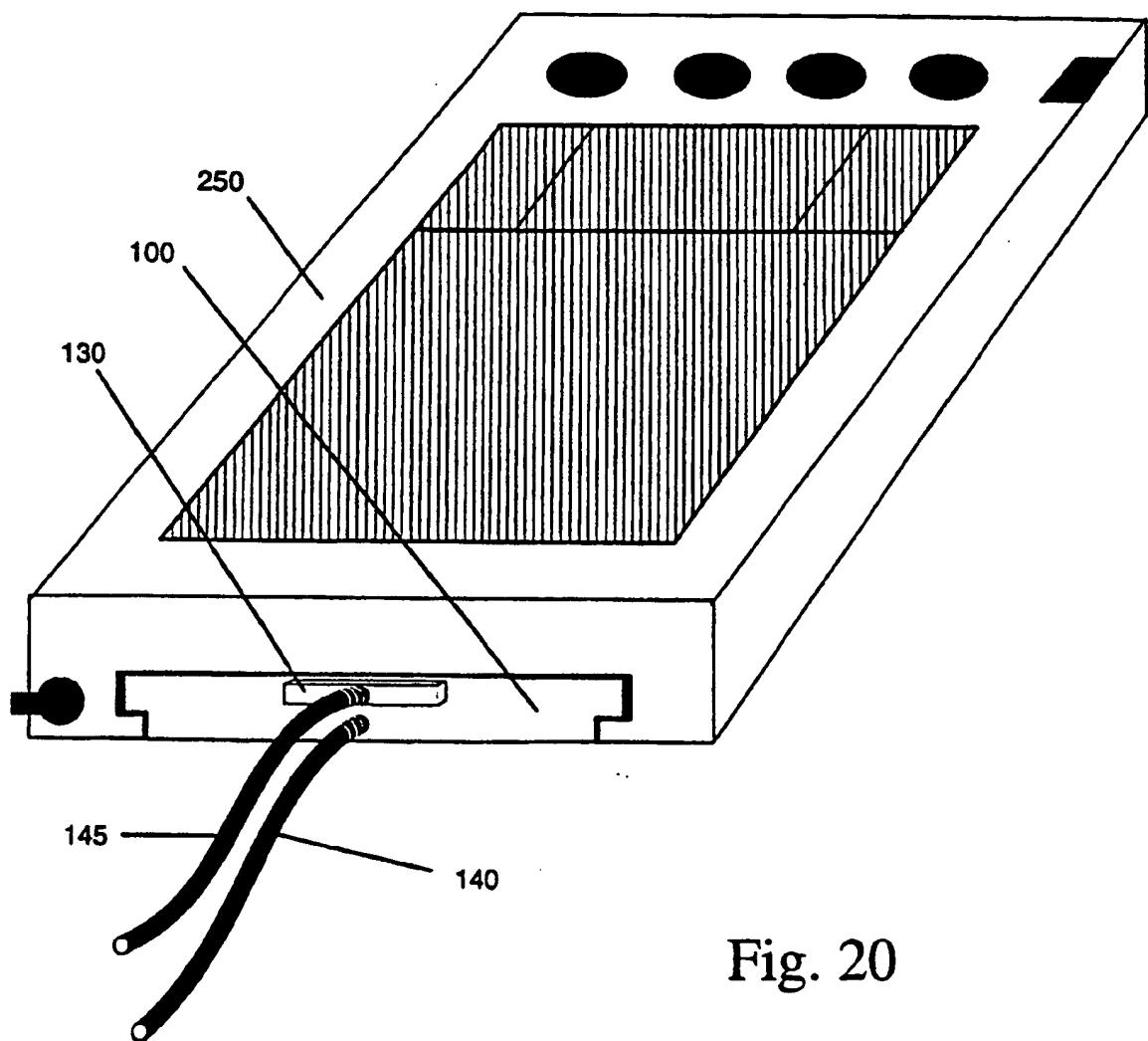


Fig. 20

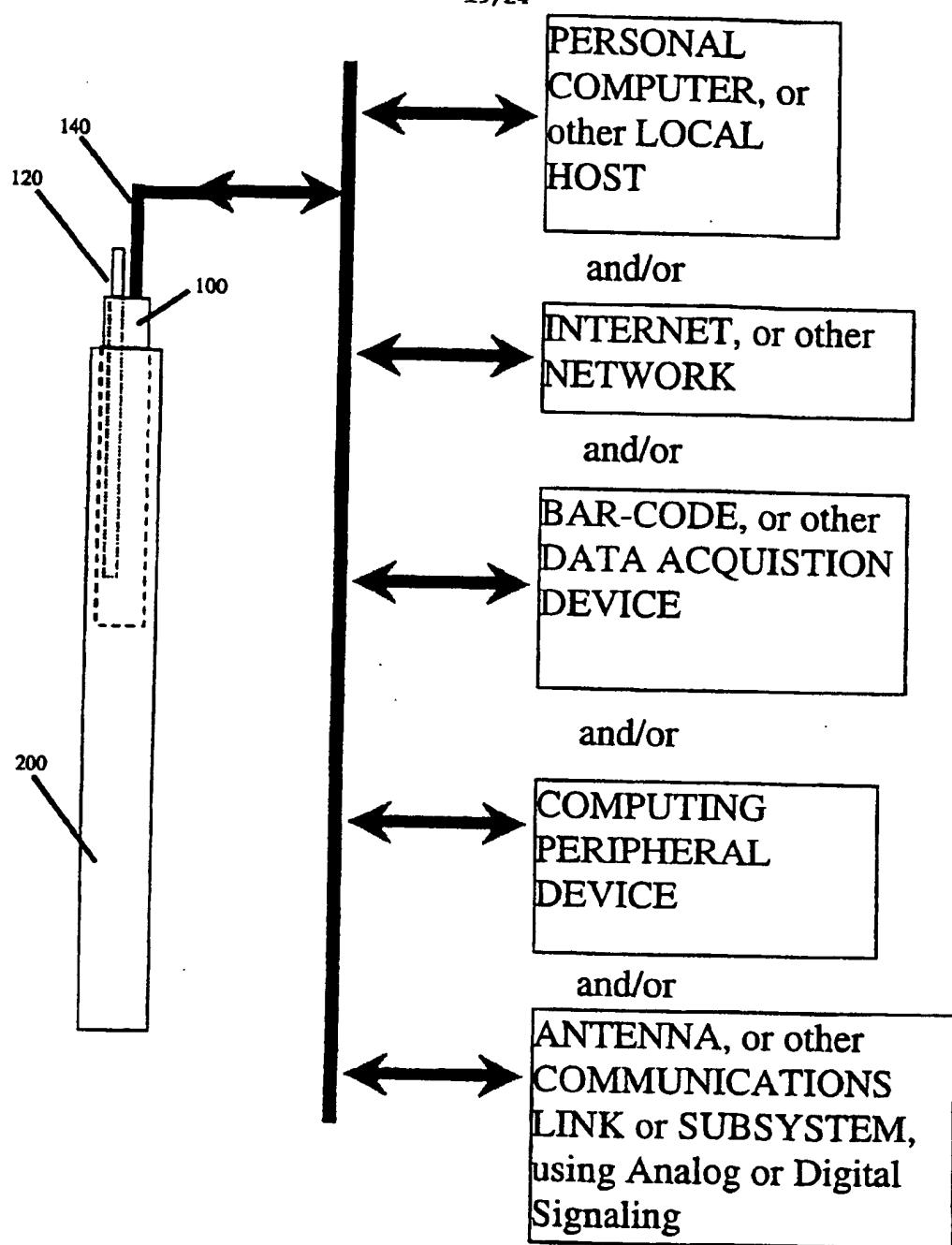


Figure 21

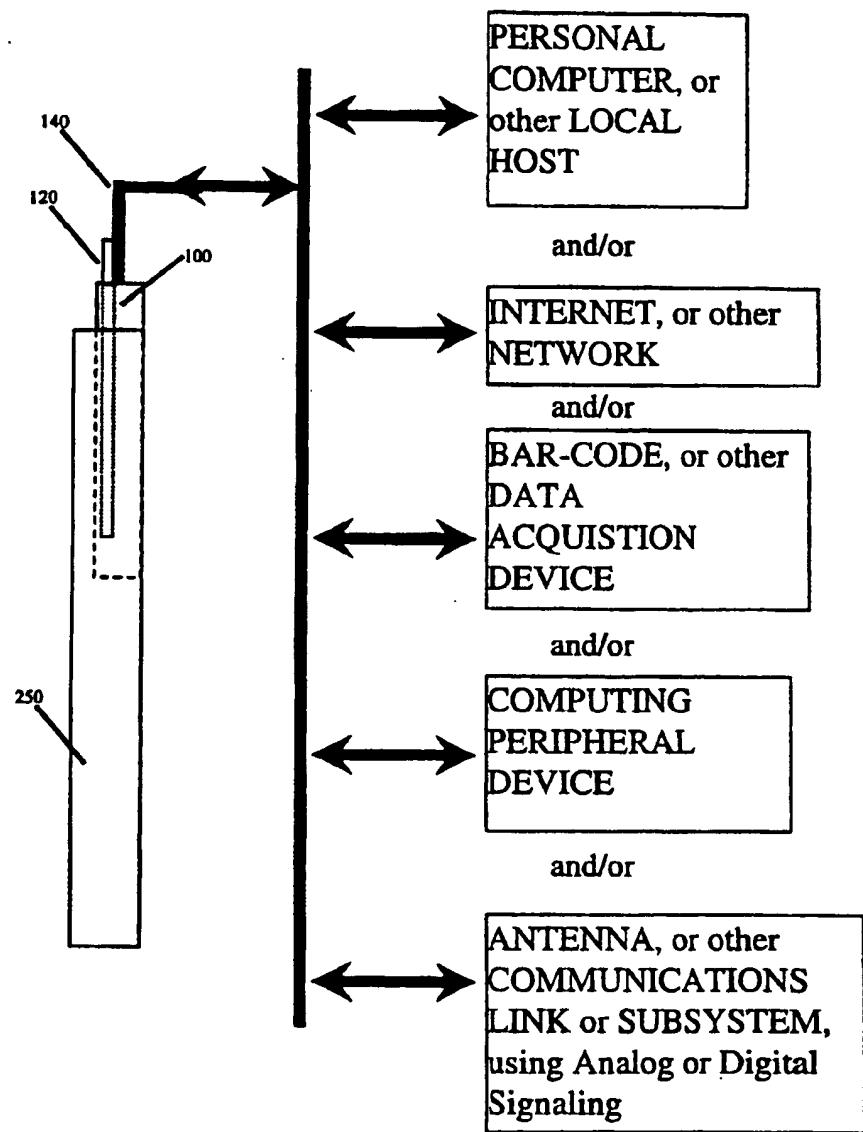


Figure 22

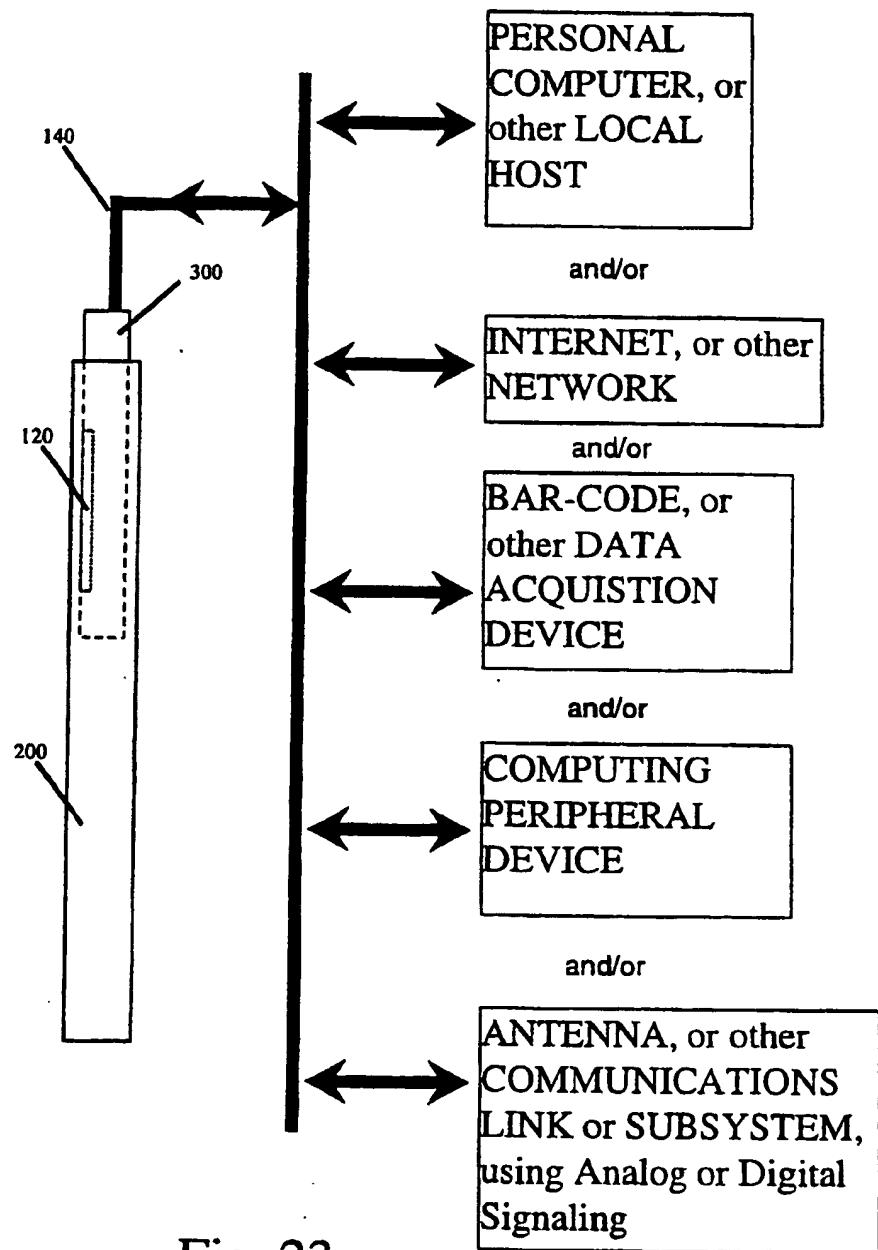


Fig. 23

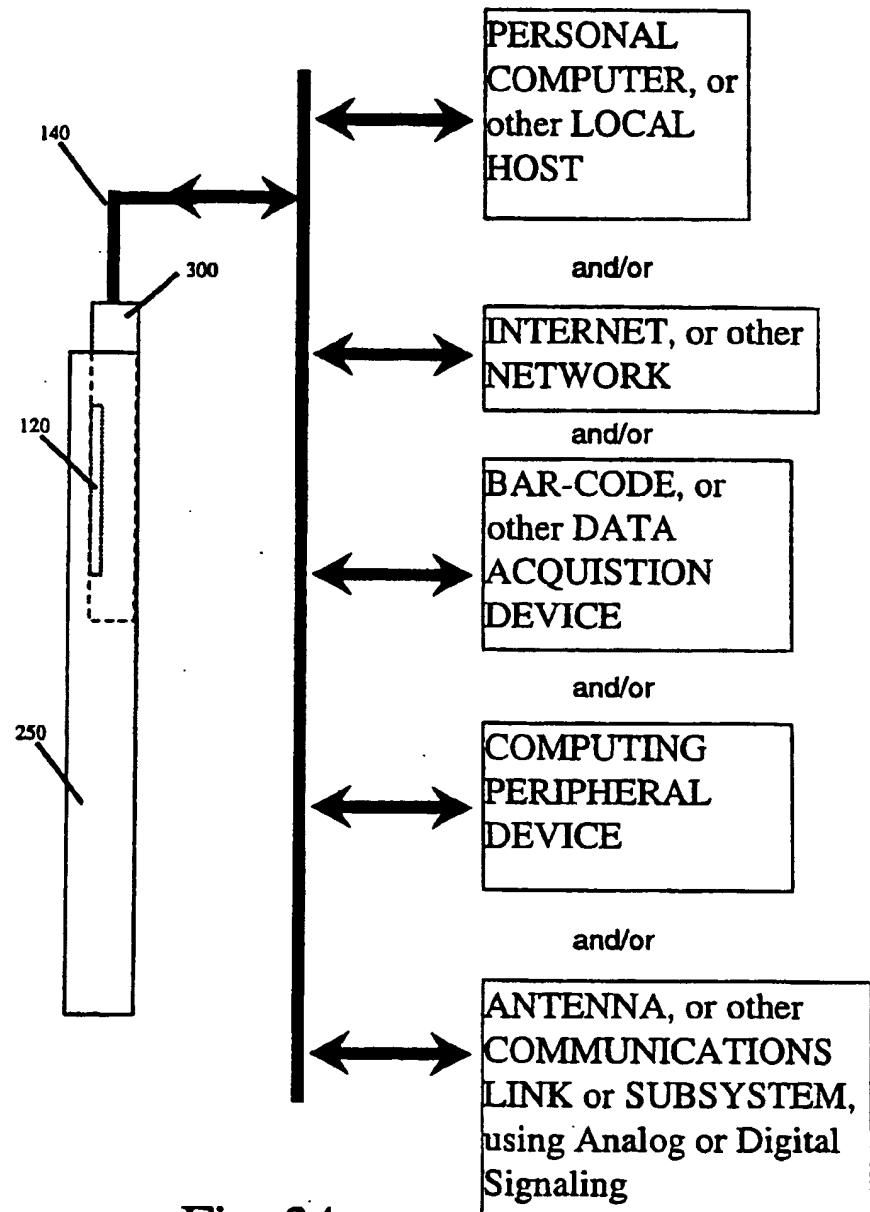


Fig. 24

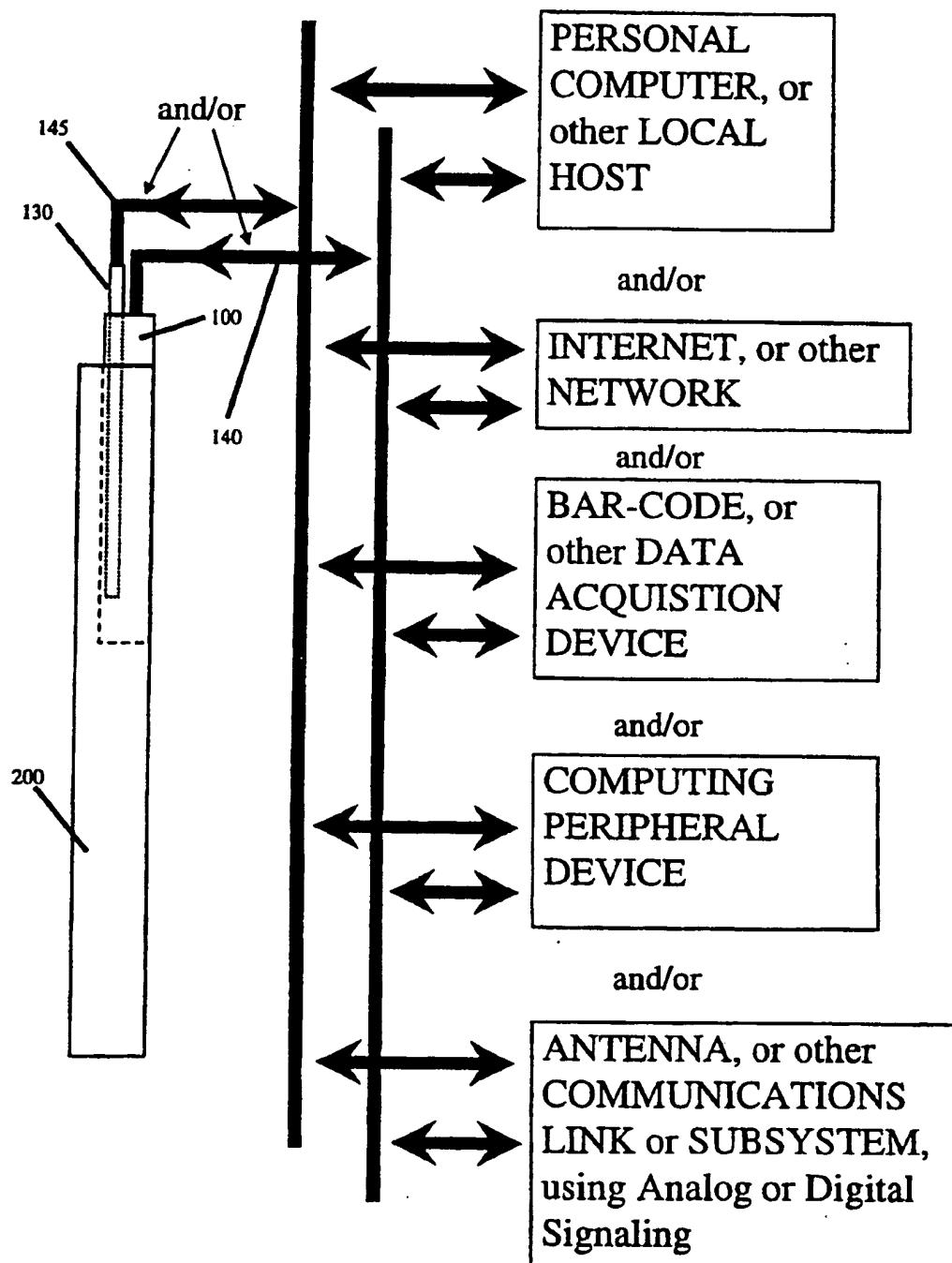


Fig. 25

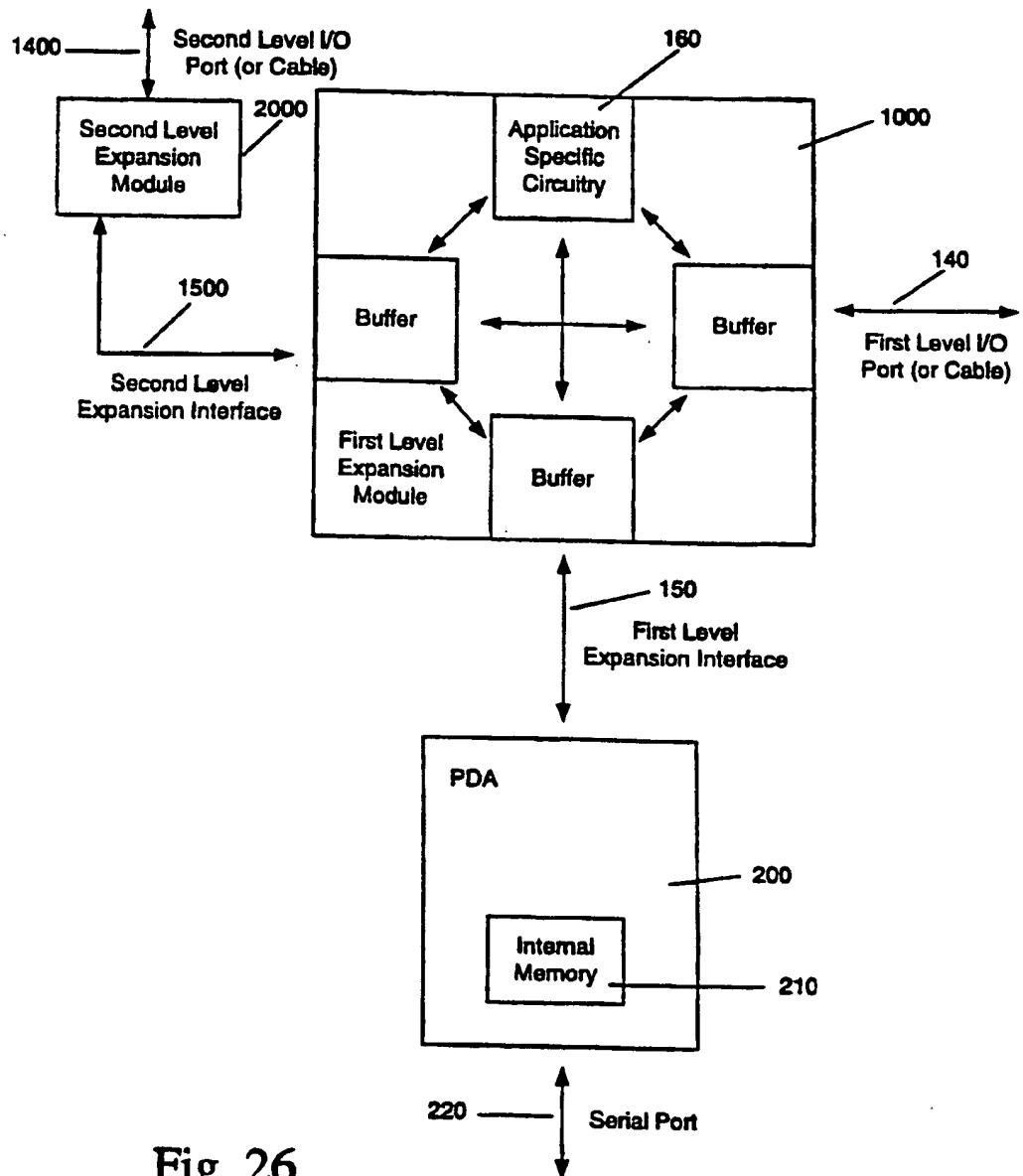


Fig. 26

HIGH-DENSITY REMOVABLE EXPANSION MODULE HAVING I/O AND SECOND-LEVEL REMOVABLE EXPANSION MEMORY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The invention is related to removable expansion modules or modules for computer hosts, such modules having particular application to portable computing hosts such as handheld computing devices.

10 The broad use of portable host computers, including laptops, notebooks, palmtops, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), and handheld computers (handhelds), has been severely hampered by limited capabilities for expansion or customization.

15 Expansion and application customization has been performed via only one, or at most two, slots for removable expansion modules for I/O, I/O adapters, memories, and memory adapters. Memory expansion modules have included DRAM, SRAM, ROM, and Flash technologies. I/O expansion modules have included dedicated peripherals, networking, modems, wireless communications, serial I/O, and bar-code and other scanners.

20 Having only one slot meant choosing between memory or peripheral expansion. In two-slot implementations, one of the slots is generally used for peripheral expansion, and the other for memory expansion. As market forces and consumer demand are pushing future PDAs to be ever smaller, allocating packaging volume for two-slots will be increasingly viewed as a costly and nonviable solution.

25 If not further qualified, a general reference in this specification and the attached claims to the terms "expansion module" or "expansion module," and possibly prefaced by "removable," should be construed as a general reference to a class of generally enclosed compact expansion devices that provide fast, reliable, and robust repeated field insertion, removal, handling, and storage, ideally suited for closed-case, user-serviceable, plug-in expansion of portable and handheld computing devices. If not further qualified, a general reference in this specification and the attached claims to the term "slot," should be construed as a reference to the physical and electrical means by which a portable computing device receives a removable expansion module of the class just defined. A reference in this specification and the attached claims to the terms "closed-case," or "sealed-case," serves to indicate that insertion and removal of an expansion device does not involve significant reconfiguration or removal of the external casing of the computing device. Closed-case is not meant to foreclose the possible user

removal of a protective access panel or the user opening of a hinged access door. Nor is it meant to foreclose that the casing may need to be removed for more significant events best performed by a qualified service person.

5 Memory and Expansion Module Standards

Two of the most popular industry standards for the slots and removable modules are the PC Module and the CompactFlash Module. The PC Module has a 16-bit variant, previously known as a PCMCIA module, and a newer 32-bit variant, also known as a Module-Bus module. PC Modules include Type I, Type II, and Type III devices. If 10 not further qualified, a general reference to PC Modules in this specification and the attached claims should be construed to refer to any of the Module-Bus (32-bit), PCMCIA (16-bit), Type I, Type II, or Type III PC Module variants.

U.S. Patent 5,815,426 ('426), ADAPTER FOR INTERFACING AN
INSERTABLE/REMOVABLE DIGITAL MEMORY APPARATUS TO A HOST
15 DATA PART, assigned to Nexcom Technology, and hereby incorporated by reference, describes these and other removable expansion module and memory types suitable for PDAs. In addition to the PC Module and CompactFlash Module formats, the '426 patent includes discussions of and references to Miniature Modules, Solid State Floppy Disk Modules (SSFDCs), MultiMediaModules (MMC), Integrated Circuit (IC) Modules (also 20 known as Smart Modules), and Subscriber Identification Module (SIM) Modules.

CompactFlash Standards

The physical, electrical, and software interface architecture of
CompactFlash Modules (CF+ Modules and CF₁ Modules) is taught in the CompactFlash
25 Specification Revision 1.3, Copyright 1998, and the CF+ and CompactFlash Specification
Revision 1.4, Copyright 1999, both by the CompactFlash Association (CFA), P.O. Box
51537, Palo Alto, CA 94303, and both of which are hereby incorporated by reference.
Parts of Figures 5 and 6 are reproduced or derived from the CompactFlash Specification
30 Revision 1.3 document. Strictly speaking, CompactFlash nomenclature uses CF₁ to denote
modules that are primarily limited to flash data storage, and uses CF+ to denote modules
that may have any or all off flash data storage, I/O devices, and magnetic disk data
storage. CF₁ and CF+ modules presently include Type I (3.3 mm thick) and Type II (5
mm thick) devices. Both Type I and Type II CF modules are 36.4 mm long by 42.8 mm
wide, or roughly "matchbook-sized." A Type III device is being defined as discussed in a

later section herein. If not further qualified, a general reference to CompactFlash (or CF) (RTR) in this specification and the attached claims should be construed to refer to any of the CF, (RTR) CF+, Type I, Type II, or Type III CompactFlash variants.

U.S. Patent 5,887,145 ('145), REMOVABLE MOTHER/DAUGHTER

5 PERIPHERAL MODULE, assigned to SanDisk Corporation, and hereby incorporated by reference, describes the required features of host systems for CompactFlash Modules, including controllers required by CompactFlash memory modules (CF₁modules) and comprehensive controllers required by CompactFlash memory and I/O modules (CF+ modules).

10

MultiMediaModule

Figure 1 represents a prior art MultiMediaModule (MMC) form factor and its pad definitions. The MMC is 1.4 mm thick, 24 mm wide, and 32 mm long. Figure 2 represents the prior art internal architecture of a generic MultiMediaModule and its registers. Figure 3 illustrates the prior art functional partitioning of a generic MultiMediaModule system. Figure 4 illustrates the prior art physical partitioning of a generic MultiMediaModule system.

The MMC and MMC related system issues are taught in the MultiMediaModule System Summary Version 2.0, Copyright January 1999, by the MultiMediaModule Association, 19672 Stevens Creek Blvd., #404, Cupertino, CA 95014-2465, which is hereby incorporated by reference. Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and part of 6 are reproduced or derived from the MultiMediaModule System Summary document. In Figure 1, the Type column of the legend is used to categorize the pin type as one of: Supply (S), Input (I), Output (O), Push-Pull (PP), Open-Drain (OD), and Not Connected (NC). The DAT (data) pin is output only (O) for read-only modules.

Figure 5 and 6 are different views comparing the form factors of the prior art CompactFlash Module (top) and MultiMediaModule (bottom). In Figures 5 and 6, the CompactFlash Module and the MultiMediaModule are both roughly to equal scale.

30 Secure Digital Memory Module and Symmetric Secure Digital Module

The Secure Digital Memory Module (SD Memory Module, or SD) is an extension of the MMC standard. The SD standard adds cryptographic security (enabling among other things, the protection of copyrighted data), up to a 4X improvement in peak data transfer rate (by redefining the existing reserved pin as a data pin and defining two

additional data pins), a mechanical write-protect switch, and improved ESD tolerance. Physically, the SD asymmetrically modifies the 1.4 mm by 24 mm wide MMC form factor by augmenting the bottom (contact) side with a 0.7 mm thick and 22.5 mm wide "belly," for an overall module thickness of 2.1 mm. The SD has the same 32 mm length

5 as the MMC.

The Symmetric Secure Digital Module (SSD Module, or SSD) is an emerging extension of the SD standard, returning to a symmetric form factor by physically augmenting the top (non-contact) side with a complementary 0.7 mm thick and 22.5 mm wide section, for an overall module thickness of 2.8 mm, and generally

10 extending the length to 38 mm. SSD Modules feature I/O expansion capability in addition to secure memory and the 38 mm length provides additional room for antennas and enables clearance for cable mounts. The I/O expansion on an SSD may thus include wireless functionality and plugged or corded wired-I/O functionality. Wireless I/O may include IR, optical, and RF methods. RF methods include the ^(infrared) Bluetooth networking

15 standard.

Adapters for Removable Memories

Adapters exist or have been prophetically disclosed for physically and electrically coupling a removable memory on a slide, or stick, to a portable host via a 20 removable expansion module of either the PCMCIA Module or CompactFlash Module form factors. The previously mentioned '426 patent describes such removable memory adapters. The focus of these existing memory adapters has been limited to merely providing an interface adapter, or bridge, between a first interface type (the host to removable-expansion-module interface) and a second interface type (the removable 25 memory stick).

PC Module Mother and CompactFlash Module Daughter Combinations

Adapters exist or have been prophetically disclosed that comprise a special mother PC Module designed to accept one or more daughter CompactFlash Modules of 30 one or more types. The previously '145 patent describes such CompactFlash adapters. The focus of these existing mother/daughter combinations has also been limited. First, the daughters have been used for memory expansion for the host platform, primarily in the form of flash-memory-based mass-storage-like devices. In this first approach, the mother module provides the requisite mass-storage controller functionality. Second, the

daughters have been used for dedicated peripheral, I/O, or communication functions. In this second approach, the mother module has a so-called comprehensive controller that augments the mass-storage controller functionality with functions commonly required or useful to multiple daughter modules. Third, in a variation of either of the first two 5 paradigms, functions of the general-purpose host may be relocated to the mother module.

Open-Back Module Expansion Standards

The previously discussed expansion module (or module) implementations have been of a first type wherein the module is mated with a closed-back mother device 10 by (full or partial) insertion into a receiving chamber that is inside the external casing of the mother device. The chamber usually is of a standardized minimum width and insertion depth. The module insertion into the chamber is facilitated by edge-guides internal to the chamber and insertion is (usually) via a standardized minimum width x minimum height circumscribed portal (mouth, or orifice) in the mother device's external 15 casing. The chamber portal is sometimes protected by a hinged or removable access panel or by a stub (a dummy module with an external end flanged to block off most of the portal) inserted into the chamber. According to this first type, the modules are designed to have dimensions compatible with the insertion depth x width, edge guides, and width x height orifice of the chamber.

20 For hand-held computer or PDA applications, a second type of expansion module also exists. The second type of expansion module makes use of a "open-back" (or open-face) industrial design approach previously applied to other hand-held devices, such as cellular telephones. In open-back hand-held devices, a standardized back-mount is made integral to the device. Families of removable components (such as batteries), 25 varying widely size and make-up but otherwise interchangeable, are designed to be compatible to the standardized back-mount. For open-back devices, the industrial design form-factor (appearance and volume) becomes a function of both the device and the mated component.

As applied to a hand-held mother device, an open-face expansion module 30 is mated with a companion open-back device by (full or partial) insertion into a receiving recess of (usually) standardized width x minimum depth that is integral to, but substantially on the outside of, the device. The module insertion into the recess is via (usually) standardized module-edge guides incorporated into the open recess of the device. In a manner not unlike that for modules in closed-back expansion applications,

open-face modules are designed to have dimensions compatible with the width x minimum depth and edge guides of the device recess. But since the recess of an open-back device by definition has no circumscribed portal, the module height and shape are largely unrestricted. Instead the height and shape of the interchangeable modules are 5 restricted only by bounds imposed by practical utility, bounds imposed to avoid mechanical interference with other objects in common system configurations, and bounds imposed by ergonomic concerns.

Expansion modules for the Handspring^(R) Visor^(R) handheld computer are an 10 example of open-face expansion modules. These modules are designed in accordance with the Handspring^(R) Springboard^(R) expansion slot. The technology of the Springboard^(R) slot is publicly disclosed in a number of documents published on the Handspring^(R) Web-Site (http://www.handspring.com). "The Springboard^(R) Platform," is a Handspring^(R) "white-paper" that broadly summarizes the technology. "Development Kit for Handspring^(R) Handheld Computers," Release 1.0, Document No. 80-0004-00, printed in 1999, gives a 15 detailed description targeted at developers of Springboard^(R) modules. Open-face functionality is also proposed for next generation CompactFlash Type III (CF+ Type III) devices, whose specification is presently being defined by a working group within the Compact Flash Association. More specifically, the CF+ Type III devices are expected to enable handhelds to continue to use the present 50-pin CompactFlash bus and connector 20 but make use of an open-back industrial design philosophy.

Background for Expansion Module Based I/O Functions

Techniques are known in the art for making and using systems that 25 perform I/O functions in an expansion module. For example, see U.S. Patent 5,671,374 ('374), PCMCIA INTERFACE MODULE COUPLING INPUT DEVICES SUCH AS BARCODE SCANNING ENGINES TO PERSONAL DIGITAL ASSISTANTS AND PALMTOP COMPUTERS, assigned to TPS Electronics, which is hereby incorporated by reference. The '374 patent teaches the use of PDAs and similar hosts equipped with PC module interfaces for I/O devices including portable laser-scanners, magnetic stripe and 30 ink readers, keyboards and keypads, OCR devices, and trackballs.

Techniques are also known in the art for making and using PC Module-based radios for applications based in a portable host. For example, see U.S. Patent 5,519,577 ('577), SPREAD SPECTRUM RADIO INCORPORATED IN A PCMCIA

TYPE II MODULE HOLDER, assigned to Symbol Technologies, and hereby incorporated by reference.

Techniques are also known in the art for making and using disk emulation devices based on flash memory. For example, see U.S. Patent 5,291,584 ('584),

5 **METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR HARD DISK EMULATION**, assigned to Nexcom Technology, and hereby incorporated by reference.

Background for Relevant Application Specific Functions

Techniques are known in the art for making and using systems that

10 download or capture compressed digital audio for storage and later playback using dedicated removable media. For example, U.S. Patent 5,676,734 ('734), **SYSTEM FOR TRANSMITTING DESIRED DIGITAL VIDEO OR AUDIO SIGNALS**, assigned to Parsec Sight/Sound, and hereby incorporated by reference, teaches a system for transmitting digital video or audio signals over a telecommunications link from a first to a
15 second party. In addition, U.S. Patent 5,579,430 ('430), **DIGITAL ENCODING PROCESS**, assigned to Fraunhofer Gesellschaft zur Foerderung der angewandten Forschung e.V., and hereby incorporated by reference, teaches processes for encoding digitized analog signals. Such processes are useful for insuring high-quality reproduction while reducing transmission bandwidth and data storage requirements.

20 Techniques are also known in the art for making and using record and playback portable host devices based on a dedicated flash memory. For example, see U.S. Patent 5,491,774 ('774), **HANDHELD RECORD AND PLAYBACK DEVICE WITH FLASH MEMORY**, assigned to Comp General Corporation, and hereby incorporated by reference, and U.S. Patent 5,839,108 ('108), **FLASH MEMORY FILE SYSTEM IN A HANDHELD RECORD AND PLAYBACK DEVICE**, assigned to Norris Communications, also hereby incorporated by reference.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The utility of computer hosts, including portable computer hosts, such as

30 PDAs (or handhelds), is enhanced by methods and apparatus for removable expansion modules (cards) having application specific circuitry, a second-level-removable memory, and optional I/O, in a number of illustrative embodiments. The term "second-level" is intended to emphasize that while the expansion module is removable from a computer host at a first-level of functionality, the expansion memory is independently removable

from the expansion module, providing a second-level of functionality. In addition to providing greater expansion utility in a compact and low profile industrial design, the present invention permits memory configuration versatility for application specific expansion modules, permitting easy user field selection and upgrades of the memory used

5 in conjunction with the expansion module. Finally, from a system perspective, the present invention enables increased parallelism and functionality previously not available to portable computer devices.

In one illustrative embodiment the removable memory is in combination with an external-I/O connector or permanently attached external-I/O device, providing

10 both I/O and memory functions in a single closed-case removable expansion module. This increases the expansion functional density for portable computer hosts, such as PDAs. That is, it increases the amount of functionality that can be accommodated within a given volume allocation for expansion devices. It also provides a viable alternative to 2-slot implementations.

15 In another illustrative embodiment the removable memory is a private memory for application specific circuitry within the closed-case-removable expansion module. This enhances the utility of portable computer hosts, such as PDAs, as universal chassis for application specific uses.

Some of the illustrative embodiments make use of a Type II CompactFlash

20 form factor, another uses a Type I form factor, but as discussed below, the invention is not limited to these particular form factors or to the CompactFlash expansion bus. As will be seen, the physical and electrical interface of the chosen expansion bus couples the expansion modules to the host, which may provides user interface functions for application specific modules.

25 The first-level modules according to some illustrative embodiments of the present invention include an end located slot and an internal connector for accepting a MultiMediaModule (MMC), Secure Digital (SD) Module, or Symmetric Secure Digital (SSD) Module, as a private removable second-level module.

Another embodiment instead uses a first-level module with a top-cavity to

30 accept a second-level module flush with the top of the first-level module, capturing the second-level module in place when the first-level module is inserted into a PDA.

In addition, the application specific module will generally have some manner of I/O to required external devices, such as scanning devices, sensors, or

transducers. Otherwise, all functionality for the application specific function is self-contained within the application specific module.

Particular application specific modules for customizing general purpose PDAs via the instant invention include a media-player module for digitized media stored 5 on removable memory and a bar-code-scanner module having scanning data stored on removable memory.

Embodiments of the present invention that make use of second-level SSD Modules (generally having secure memory and I/O capability) enable “removable I/O in removable I/O” (or “IOIO”) solutions, wherein each native expansion slot of a PDA can 10 be simultaneously configured with two independent expansion-module-based I/O functions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 represents a prior art MultiMediaModule form factor and its pad 15 definitions;

Figure 2 represents the prior art internal architecture of a generic MultiMediaModule and its registers;

Figure 3 illustrates the prior art functional partitioning of a generic MultiMediaModule system;

Figure 4 illustrates the prior art physical partitioning of a generic MultiMediaModule system;

Figure 5 and 6 illustrate the form factors of the prior art CompactFlash module and MultiMediaModule, respectively;

Figure 7 is an abstract drawing representing removable expansion module 25 embodiment separate from the PDA, and with the I/O and memory disengaged from the removable expansion module;

Figure 8 is an abstract drawing representing an exploded view of the removable expansion module, including the outer frame, inner PCB, and connectors;

Figure 9 is an abstract drawing representing a view of the removable 30 expansion module, with the outer frame removed, and a removable memory roughly aligned with the contact fingers to which it mates within the removable expansion module;

Figure 10 is an abstract drawing representing a cut away side view of the removable expansion module, with the removable memory inserted into the removable expansion module;

5 Figure 11 is an axonometric projection of a contact finger assembly for making electrical connection with the second-level-removable expansion memory;

Figure 12 is an axonometric projection of the upper section of a CF^(RIM) Type II frame in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

Figure 13 is an axonometric projection of a CF^(RIM) Type II top case, comprising the upper section of the CF^(RIM) frame of Figure 12 with a metal panel top;

10 Figure 14 is an axonometric projection of an assembly that includes a CF^(RIM) Type II expansion module bottom case, a Printed Circuit Board (PCB), a connector for mating with a PDA, a connector for mating with external I/O, an MMC connector mounted on the Printed Circuit Board, and a CF^(RIM) Type II expansion module top case without metal top;

15 Figure 15 is an axonometric projection of the assembly of Figure 14 with a metal top, forming the complete CF^(RIM) Type II module, together with an inserted MMC;

Figure 16 shows an axonometric projection of an expansion module according to an alternate embodiment of the present invention that has an open recess for receiving an expansion memory;

20 Figure 17 is a cross section view of the expansion module of Figure 16;

Figure 18 illustrates a PDA populated with a first-level removable expansion module having I/O and wherein the first-level module is populated with a second-level removable memory in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

25 Figure 19 illustrates a PDA populated with a first-level removable open-face expansion module having I/O and wherein the first-level module is populated with a second-level removable memory in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 20 illustrates a PDA populated with a first-level removable open-face expansion module having I/O and wherein the first-level module is populated with a second-level removable expansion module having memory and I/O in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

30 Figure 21 illustrates some of the various types of I/O for which the PDA and removable expansion module of Figure 18 may be equipped;

Figure 22 illustrates some of the various types of I/O for which the PDA and removable open-face expansion module of Figure 19 may be equipped;

Figure 23 illustrates a PDA having a closed-back industrial design, equipped with a top-cavity expansion module, and coupled to various types of I/O, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention;

Figure 24 illustrates a PDA having an open-back industrial design, equipped with a top-cavity expansion module, and coupled to various types of I/O, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention;

Figure 25 illustrates some of the various types of I/O for which the PDA and removable expansion module of Figure 20 may be equipped; and

Figure 26 illustrates a PDA and expansion module in accordance with a "fully connected" implementation of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

15 Components of the Expansion Module

Figure 7 is an abstract drawing representing a closed-case removable expansion module (card) 100, i.e., an expansion module that may be inserted into and removed out of a closed-case computer host. The module is especially suitable for use in a portable host, such as a PDA. System embodiments and applications will be discussed 20 below. In accordance with the present invention, the expansion module of Figure 7 includes a connector 141 for I/O interconnect and a slot 121 for a removable memory. Figure 7 shows the I/O interconnect 140 and removable memory 120 disengaged from the removable expansion module.

Figure 8 is an abstract drawing representing an exploded view of the 25 removable expansion module 100 of Figure 7, including upper 105 and lower 110 frame members of the outer frame, inner printed circuit board (PCB) 115, and connectors. An opening 111 is provided in the lower frame 110 for receiving the connector 141 for I/O interconnect. A second opening 113 is provided in the lower frame 110 for receiving the connector 150 for host interconnect. Additionally, a slot 112 is provided on both sides of 30 the opening 111 to aid in the alignment and retention of the connector 141, and a slot 114 is provided on both sides of opening 113 to aid in the alignment and retention of the connector 150. An opening 116 is provided in the PCB for receiving the connector 141.

Figure 9 is an abstract drawing representing a view of the removable expansion module 100 of Figure 7, with the outer frame members removed, and a

removable memory 120 roughly aligned with the contact fingers 180 to which it mates within the removable expansion module. Circuitry 160 is provided, including I/O adapter circuitry, removable memory adapter circuitry, and application-specific circuitry. A support shelf 170 supports, aligns, separates, and isolates the underside of the contact fingers 180 from the circuitry 160.

5 Figure 10 is an abstract drawing representing a cut away side view of the removable expansion module 100 of Figure 7, with the removable memory 120 inserted into the removable expansion module.

In an illustrative embodiment, the expansion module 100 and associated
10 host connector 150 are compatible with the Type II CompactFlash Module as described in the previously referenced CompactFlash Specification. The I/O connector 141 is
compatible with a PC-Module industry standard Honda^(TM) 15-pin connector. The slot
121, removable memory 120, and removable memory adapter circuitry of circuitry 160,
are compatible with the MultiMediaModule as described in the previously referenced
15 MultiMediaModule System Summary.

Details of Component Assemblies and Stages of Assembly

Figure 11 through Figure 13 are axonometric projections showing the component assemblies for a CF^(TM) Type II expansion module illustrative embodiment of the
20 expansion module of Figure 7 and in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 11 shows a contact finger assembly for making electrical connection with the second-level-removable expansion module. In certain implementations it may be desirable for the contact fingers corresponding to the power supply (module pins 3 and 4 in the assembly of Figure 11) to be offset from the other
25 contact fingers. This may be done so that as the module is inserted, connection of the power supply occurs prior to connection of the other signals, and similarly, as the module is removed, disconnection of the other signals occurs prior to disconnection of the power supply. The underside of the contact finger assembly additionally has four alignment pins, two underneath the ends of each of the far side portions of the assembly. These pins
30 and the assembly as a whole engage the PCB by way of matching alignment holes drilled in the PCB. Prior to mounting the contact finger assembly onto the PCB, a solder paste is applied to the PCB. The contact assembly and PCB will be ultimately reflow soldered, permanently attaching the contact assembly to the PCB.

The PCB acts as a chassis, supporting the expansion bus connector, the I/O connector, the contact finger assembly, and the application specific active circuitry of the expansion module. In the particular embodiment shown, due to space constraints on the topside of the PCB, the active circuitry is limited to the bottom side of the PCB.

5 However, the use of other connectors and other contact finger assemblies will generally enable placement of active circuitry on the topside of the PCB.

Figure 12 illustrates the upper section 105 of a CF(Type II frame in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. Figure 13 diagrams a CF(Type II top case, comprising the upper section of the CF/frame of Figure 12 with a metal panel top, and in 10 accordance with the present invention, "Hooks" 190 are formed into the upper section, specifically to act (in conjunction with the metal panel top) as a slotted guide for insertion of the expansion memory.

Figures 14 and 15 are axonometric projections showing the CF(Type II expansion module in various stages of assembly using the component assemblies of 15 Figures 11 through 13. Figure 14 includes a CF(Type II expansion module bottom case, a Printed Circuit Board (PCB), a connector for mating with a PDA, a connector for mating with external I/O, an MMC connector mounted on the Printed Circuit Board, and a CF (RIM) Type II expansion module top case without metal top. Figure 15 shows the completed CF (RIM) Type II module, including the metal top, together with an inserted MMC.

20

Top-Cavity Embodiment

Figure 16 shows an axonometric projection of an expansion module according to an alternative illustrative embodiment of the present invention. Figure 17 is a cross section view of the expansion module of Figure 16. The top case of this module 25 has a cavity (an open recess) for receiving an expansion memory (an MMC in the illustration shown), the recess having the general shape of the expansion memory, but being slightly larger. The connector spring contacts for the memory emerge through the top of the case via one hole (a slot as shown), or a plurality of holes (slots) wherein each contact protrudes through a respective hole. In a preferred embodiment, the top-cavity 30 expansion memory of Figure 16 is implemented in the CF(Type I form factor. The use of the CF(Type I form factor for removable expansion modules having I/O and second-level removable memory is enabled by the use of the top-cavity and the general orientation shown for the expansion memory with respect to the I/O and expansion bus connectors (a 90-degree rotation compared to the non-top-cavity embodiments).

Persons skilled in the art will recognize that such top-cavity modules may be readily implemented in either the closed-back or open-back industrial design approaches by appropriately varying the rail configuration of the package frame in accordance with the desired expansion module standard.

5 The expansion memory is deposited into the receiving cavity, the top of the expansion memory being roughly flush to slightly above the outer perimeter of the top case. When the module is inserted into a compatible slot of a host device, the expansion memory is locked into the receiving cavity by the presence of the adjacent wall (or roof) of the slot. The connector spring contacts of the expansion module are depressed by the
10 presence of the expansion memory, thus effecting the mating (electrical continuity) of these contacts with the contacts of the expansion memory.

The top-cavity expansion module of Figure 16 and Figure 17 also has an I/O connector that is accessible for I/O functions, including any of those described herein. Figure 23 illustrates a PDA having a closed-back industrial design, equipped with a top-
15 cavity expansion module, and coupled to various types of I/O, in accordance with the present invention. Figure 24 illustrates a PDA having a open-back industrial design, equipped with a top-cavity expansion module, and coupled to various types of I/O, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

20 Circuitry and Functionality of the Expansion Module

In an illustrative embodiment of the invention, circuitry 160 includes I/O adapter circuitry and removable memory adapter circuitry. The I/O adapter functionality may include one or more of, but is not limited to, Ethernet, serial port, audio, telephone, antenna, and special-function interfaces such as bar code and other scanners. The
25 removable memory adapter functionality may include one or more of, but is not limited to, main memory expansion, mass-media emulation, and other host-based special-purpose memory applications.

In accordance with an illustrative embodiment, circuitry 160 further includes application-specific circuitry for which the management of the removable
30 memory is an ancillary function to the primary function of the specific application. Specific examples of such application-specific expansion modules having both I/O and removable memory are provided in later sections.

In preferred implementations of the illustrative embodiments mentioned above, the functions performed by the removable memory are those of a

MultiMediaModule adapter as illustrated in the MultiMediaModule adapter section of the MultiMediaModule system architecture diagram of Figure 3. If the removable memory is being used to provide host-base-memory expansion, such as described for the first embodiment, then the host must provide the functionality illustrated by the Application 5 and Application Adapter sections of Figure 3. If the removable memory is being used at least sometimes as an ancillary memory (at least sometimes private) to the application-specific circuitry contained on the expansion module, such as for the second embodiment, then the application-specific circuitry must provide the Application and Application Adapter section functionality, or else the application-specific circuitry must call on host 10 services for such functionality.

Examples of known techniques for making and using other types of memory adapter circuitry for closed-case expansion modules or with flash memory are found in the previously referenced '145, '426, '584, '774, and '108 patents, among others. Examples of known techniques for making and using I/O adapter and application-specific circuitry for functions implemented in closed-case expansion modules and with flash memory are found in the previously referenced '374, '577, '774, and '108 patents, among others. 15

Frame Kit Assembly Details

20 The top and bottom frames may be composed of metal or plastic. In a preferred embodiment, the top and bottom frame portions each have a plastic base augmented with an outer metal plate over much of the interior region of the large panel surface of each portion. The metal plate extends to the edges of the panel at the connector ends of each portion and is attached to both connectors. In addition, smaller metal strips, 25 or ears, on both sides at the finger-grip end (opposite to the host connector) extend from the plate to the edges of the panel and continue onto the sides. The frame kit is assembled and the side strips are sonically welded together on both sides of the casings. The welded strips and plates form a single continuous metal band around the top and bottom frames that permanently physically retains the assembled kit.

30

I/O Interconnect Options

I/O devices may be interconnected with the expansion module via three different embodiments. First, a connector such as a PC-Module industry-standard Honda- (M) style 15-pin connector may be used with a mating detachable cable. Detachable cables

are preferred for light-duty applications where a continuous I/O device connection is neither needed nor desired. Second, a fully integrated fixed cable, having a molded strain relief may be used. Such a fixed cable maintains solid contact in high vibration environments, is protected against lateral stress, and seals out dust. Fixed cables are

5 preferred for dedicated industrial or field applications. Third, at least a portion of the I/O device may be abutted and attached (often via a snap-in-place mechanism) directly to the expansion module, obviating the need for either a detachable or fixed cable. Cableless snap-on I/O devices are preferred for small mostly self-contained I/O devices that permit a compact PDA, expansion-module, I/O-device combination that handles physically as a

10 single piece of equipment. In the instant invention, such snap-on I/O devices must make allowance for the removable memory.

PDA having Application Specific Module with Removable Media

Figure 18 illustrates a PDA 200 equipped with a removable expansion module 100 having both I/O interconnect 140 and removable memory 120 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The application specific circuitry of the expansion module may be used in conjunction with application specific software running on the PDA. This permits the application specific circuitry of the expansion module to make use of the output (e.g., display, sound) and input (e.g., tablet, buttons, any I/O ports) capabilities of the PDA for user interface functions associated with the specific application. In particular the PDA's display/input-tablet provides for virtual controls and visual indicators for the application. Figure 21 illustrates some of the various types of I/O for which the PDA and removable expansion module of Figure 18 may be equipped. Application-specific functions may include special-function digital, analog, and mixed-signal electronics; special-function I/O; special-function data-pumps; and special-function accelerators.

Expansion Module Based O/S Related Functions

Techniques are known in the art for making and using systems that

30 perform O/S related functions in conjunction with expansion modules. These techniques include: software enabled hot-swapping of expansion modules; auto launch of application programs specific to the inserted module; and "plug and play" ease of use via dynamic load of associated drivers on module insertion and dynamic unload of the associated drivers on module removal. Preferred embodiments of the application-specific

expansion modules discussed herein will generally make use of these O/S related techniques. Unlike prior art systems, systems designed in accordance with embodiments of the present invention will generally need to manage both I/O and memory device drivers.

5

Modes of Use and Potential for Increased Parallelism

Removable expansion modules according to embodiments of the present invention may operate in a number of different modes. At a basic level, they may be used solely to interface an external peripheral to the host device via the I/O connector, they

10 may be used solely to interface a second-level-removable expansion memory with the host device, and they may be used to simultaneously interface the host device with both an external peripheral and an expansion memory.

At a more general level, more advanced modes of operation are also possible. In a specific, but not limiting illustrative embodiment, Figure 26 shows a PDA 220, a first-level expansion module 1000, and a second-level expansion module 2000, in accordance with a "fully connected" implementation of the present invention. The expansion module 1000 of Figure 26 includes six major data transfer paths capable of simultaneous operation; application specific circuitry 160; and data buffers at the first-level expansion interface 150, the second-level expansion interface 1500, and the I/O port 20 (plugged-wired, corded-wired, or wireless) 140. Each of the data buffers generally has one or more stages of FIFO storage for each data path coupled to each buffer. The inclusion of any of the data buffers, the extent of FIFO buffering, the existence of any particular one of the data paths, and management of bridging transfers by the circuitry in the expansion module, are specific to a given application. The second-level expansion 25 module 2000, may include be of a variety of types, including SSD modules having a second-level I/O port (plugged-wired, corded-wired, or wireless) 1400.

Prior art PDAs 200 (or 250) have limited modes of use and can generally affect significant data transfers only between any of their integral main memory 210, integral serial port 220, and integral expansion module bus 150. The addition of prior art 30 expansion modules to PDAs does not alter the number of significant data transfer paths or number of significant simultaneous data transfers. Clearly, the expansion module 1000 of Figure 26 greatly increases the potential system-level parallelism over that of the prior-art.

Application-Specific Embodiments

Generic Removable-Media Applications

The present invention enables general-purpose portable hosts to perform

5 application-specific functions requiring dedicated ROM. A first large ROM-based application category is that of prerecorded media, such as music, audio, video, and text (for books, newspapers, and other publications). A second large ROM-based application category is customization for programmable devices, such as games, language translators, and other devices having "personality" modules.

10 The present invention also enables general-purpose portable hosts to perform application-specific functions requiring non-volatile read/write memory for data-capture, data-logging, data-checkpoints or backups, transaction logging, and data-transport.

In the illustrated embodiments the non-volatile read/write memory is flash

15 memory in accordance with the standard MultiMediaModule. Such removable flash-memory-based application-specific functions have particular utility to medical and other data acquisition, secure commerce, financial and personal productivity devices making use of unique removable memories for each of multiple individuals, projects, or accounts.

The removable flash-based memory is also well suited where "sneaker-

20 net" is a viable data transport. Provided manual/user intervention is acceptable, and depending on the speed of data link I/O incorporated into the expansion module, the physical transport of a removable memory device between a PDA-based expansion module and an external system may provide the best solution to fast local transport of large data-sets. For similar reasons, the use of removable memory devices may provide

25 the best solution to rapidly reconfiguring an application-specific expansion module to initiate a large program or use a large data sets. The use of labeled, color-coded, or otherwise distinctive, removable memory devices also may provide the best solution for ease of use for users needing to select a particular program or data set from many for reconfiguring an application-specific expansion module.

30

Generic Removable I/O in Removable I/O Applications

As shown in Figures 20 and 25, the present invention enables general-purpose portable hosts to perform a first application-specific I/O function in a first-level removable module having a slot for a second-level removable module for performing a

second application-specific I/O function via a second-level I/O coupling 145. Removable I/O functions generally include direct peripheral connections (such as pointing, keyboard, bar-code scanners, printing, or video/imaging/display devices), peripheral expansion buses (such as USB, Firewire, or SCSI), networking (such as Ethernet, Bluetooth^(ntr) and other shared media methods), or communications (such as modems, serial devices, and other data communication methods).

5 Connectivity is an increasingly important application class of I/O functionality for portable hosts. Specific connectivity scenarios include: portable-to-mobile phone, portable-to-portable(s), portable-to-desktop, portable-to-network, portable-10 to-peripheral, and portable-to-embedded system. "Removable-in-removable" configurations enabled by the present invention permit simultaneous realization of a plurality of connectivity scenarios.

Specific Application Examples

15 Media Player Application

An embodiment of the present invention permits a general purpose PDA to be customized (specially adapted) for use as a portable/wearable media player, at the highest-level of functionality not unlike a portable Compact Disk player. Such a player uses the removable memory to store and playback digitally encoded media such as music, 20 audio, or video. In a preferred embodiment the player makes use of the MPEG Layer 3 standard for digital audio encoding, generally known as MP3. Another embodiment makes use of the Microsoft^(ntr) Digital Audio standard. Other aspects of a specific embodiment include an integral AM/FM receiver, a connector for a headset with an integral antenna for the receiver, and an auto-start on insert feature that initiates the media 25 playback upon insertion of the removable memory. The PDA's display/input-tablet provides the virtual controls and visual indicators for the media player.

Module For Subscriber Services

In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, an expansion 30 module having I/O and removable memory is inserted into a computer host. The I/O is coupled to a receiver capable of receiving a large number of broadcast messages and services. The removable memory contains subscriber services information for each individual user. The expansion module uses the subscriber services information to filter out messages and services not applicable to the present status of the subscriber. The

PDA's display/input-tablet provides the virtual controls and visual indicators for the display and access of captured messages and services.

Bar-Code Scanning Application (a backup storage example)

- 5 In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, an expansion module having I/O and removable memory is inserted into a computer host, a bar-coding peripheral is connected to the I/O portion of the module, and a removable memory module is inserted into the memory slot of the module. After each scan the scanned information is transferred through the I/O connection to the host computer for processing.
- 10 Additionally, a backup copy of the scanned information is stored on the removable memory. Should the computer host fail or should the operator need to verify scans, the backup can be interrogated with the same or a different host.

Personal Environmental and Medical Monitoring Devices

- 15 An embodiment of the present invention permits a general purpose PDA to be customized as a portable/wearable personal environmental monitor. Equipped with the appropriate sensors and application-specific circuitry for sensor signal processing, such a device performs time-stamped data logging of environmental attributes such as ionizing radiation, temperature, and humidity. Similarly, a portable/wearable personal media
- 20 monitor data logs health-related attributes such as pulse, temperature, respiration, and blood pressure. The PDA's display/input-tablet provides the virtual controls and visual indicators for the monitoring devices.

Automotive and Industrial Diagnostic Monitoring and Control

- 25 The combined I/O interconnect and removable memory of embodiments of the present invention also permits a general purpose PDA to be customized for use as a data logging diagnostic monitor or time-based control device. It is known that the diagnostic connectors of certain vehicles can be adapted to interface with PDAs for real-time monitoring of critical vehicle subsystems. The present invention permits such
- 30 diagnostic monitoring data to be communicated via the I/O interconnect and logged to the removable memory. Such a tool facilitates tracking subsystem performance over extended periods of time, and permits real-time and deferred graphics of time-varying system performance attributes. The PDA's display/input-tablet provides the virtual controls and visual indicators for the diagnostic monitor.

Miscellaneous Removable Memory Applications

Another example application is wireless-modem based (I/O serial data-com link to cell-phone) Web-browsing (digital modem data transferred over expansion bus interface) while simultaneously playing back stored music (data from expansion memory interface transferred over expansion bus interface). A final example application is receiving location data (I/O data-com link to GPS receiver), retrieving map data (via expansion memory interface), and PDA display of integrated map and location data (I/O and memory data transferred over expansion bus interface).

10

Exemplary Removable I/O in Removable I/O Application

A first-level removable I/O module provides a corded interface to a mobile phone acting as a wireless modem to a remote network (such as the Internet). A second-level SSD-compliant removable I/O module, inserted into the first-level module, provides an interface to a ^(nm) Bluetooth-based local network with multiple devices. The first-level removable I/O and the second-level removable I/O are configured to provide a gateway between the two networks, enabling remote network access for any of the multiple ^(nm) devices in the Bluetooth local network.

20 Conclusion

The expansion module of the present invention enables general-purpose portable hosts having a single native expansion slot to achieve a first-level expansion function (generally having I/O) in simultaneous conjunction with a second-level removable module. In one use of such a combination, the second-level removable module may have little or no interrelationship with the first-level expansion function. Thus a second-level removable memory (or I/O function) may be dedicated to the system or application software running on the host, either directly, e.g., as some portion of the main-memory of the host, or indirectly as an emulation substitute for host mass-storage (i.e., disk drives).

25 Moreover, embodiments of the present invention also enable system approaches wherein the second-level removable module is interrelated to the first-level expansion function. Specifically, a first-level removable expansion module having I/O functionality may have private (or shared) access to a second-level removable expansion module (generally having memory and/or I/O functionality). The present invention thus

enables portable computer hosts, such as PDAs, to be used as customizable platforms for many application-specific functions that require a removable module dedicated to the application.

Although the present invention has been described using particular illustrative embodiments, it will be understood that many variations in construction, arrangement and use are possible within the scope of the invention. For example the number of I/O interconnects, removable memories, contact fingers, number and type of application-specific circuits, and the size, speed, and type of technology used may generally be varied in each component of the invention.

10 The invention is further not limited to the specific expansion module technology of the illustrative embodiments. In specific but not limiting examples, the invention is equally applicable to any of the present and future variants of the CompactFlash (including any of the Type I, Type II, and proposed Type III variants), PC Module (including any of the 32-bit, 16-bit, Type I, Type II, and Type III variants), and 15 Springboard (or other open-back expansion module) standards, as well as other removable expansion module standards and technologies.

Nor is the invention limited to a specific number and type of expansion I/O connector and I/O signaling as used in the illustrative embodiments. The invention is equally applicable to the use of multiple I/O connectors of one or more connector types.

20 In addition, various and multiple types of I/O signaling may be employed.

Nor is the invention's second-level removable expansion memory limited to the MultiMediaModule expansion memory standard of the illustrative embodiments, but is equally applicable to use of other types of second-level removable memory or media. In specific but not limiting examples, the invention is equally applicable to the 25 use of present and future variants of MMCs, SDs, SSDs, Miniature Modules, SSFDCs, Smart Modules, and SIM Modules.

At the system level, the invention is not limited to the illustrated embodiments in which a removable expansion module with second-level-removable expansion memory is directly plugged into a computing host, but is equally applicable to 30 situations in which one or more intervening adapters or "dongles" is used to adapt or couple between the interfaces of the expansion module and a computing host device or system. In a specific but not limiting example, the invention is applicable to the use of a ^(CFM) ^(CFM) ^(PC) CFModule with a CF-to-PC Module adapter, so that a CFModule according to the present invention can operate indirectly in a PC Module slot.

At the system level, the invention is also not limited to the illustrated embodiments in which a removable expansion module with second-level-removable expansion memory is used in a PDA, but is equally applicable to use in any host device or system benefiting from the use of a removable expansion module having second-level-removable expansion memory. In specific but not limiting examples, the invention is equally applicable to present or future variants of desktops, servers, workstations, network computers, laptops, notebooks, palmtops, handheld computers (handhelds), information appliances, audio recording and playback devices, imaging devices including scanners and digital cameras, video recorders, fax machines, copy machines, smart phones, point-of-sale terminals, bar-code scanners, other special purpose data-acquisition devices, printers, other special purpose data-output devices, communication systems, network interface or networking infrastructure devices operating at any one or more levels of a data-communications protocol stack, network systems including any of the foregoing devices, and systems implementing networks and network applications at any scale including networks characterized as local area, departmental, enterprise wide, metropolitan area, state wide, regional, national, and the Internet.

More generally, functionally equivalent techniques, now known or that become known to those skilled in the art, may be employed to implement various components in place of those illustrated. The present invention is thus to be construed as including all possible modification and variations encompassed within the scope of the appended claims.

22 10 03

CLAIMS

1. A first level removable expansion module for engagement with a portable host when inserted into the 5 host, the first-level module comprising:

 a host-interconnect for coupling with the host when the first-level module is inserted in the opening in the host;

 10 an I/O interconnect for coupling with an external I/O device;

 I/O adapter circuitry coupled to the I/O interconnect; a second-level interconnect for coupling with a second-level expansion module; and

 15 second-level adapter circuitry coupled to the second-level interconnect;

 wherein the first-level module has an opening sized and positioned to allow insertion of the second-level expansion module into the opening so as to engage the second-level interconnect while the first-level module is 20 engaged with the portable host, and to allow withdrawal of the second-level expansion module from the opening so as to disengage from the second-level interconnect while the first-level module is engaged with the portable host.

2. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein:

 25 the second-level module is a removable memory module; and

 the second-level adapter circuitry is memory controller circuitry.

3. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the second- 30 level expansion module includes:

 a second-level module I/O interconnect for coupling with an additional external I/O device; and

 second-level module I/O adapter circuitry coupled to the second-level module I/O interconnect.

35 4. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the first-level module is a CompactFlash module.

5. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the opening is compatible with a MultiMediaModule, and the second-level adapter circuitry is MultiMediaModule adapter circuitry.
6. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the I/O 5 adapter circuitry is a serial I/O adapter and the I/O-interconnect includes a cable having a standard serial connector.
7. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the I/O adapter circuitry is a local area network adapter and the 10 I/O-interconnect includes a cable having a standard local area network connector.
8. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the I/O adapter circuitry is a parallel adapter and the I/O-interconnect includes a cable having a standard parallel 15 connector.
9. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the I/O-interconnect is a 15-pin connector integral to the first-level module.
10. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the first- 20 level module is designed to abut and fasten with at least part of the I/O device such that the I/O-interconnect for coupling with the I/O device does not use a cable.
11. The first-level module of claim 1, and further comprising:
 - 25 a printed circuit board (PCB) that supports the I/O adapter circuitry and the second-level adapter circuitry; and
an outside frame at least partly surrounding the PCB and at least partly defining the opening.
 - 30 12. The first-level module of claim 11, wherein:
the I/O interconnect includes an I/O connector mounted on the PCB;
the outside frame has an opening to permit and guide the insertion of second-level module above the I/O 35 connector;
the second-level interconnect includes a contact assembly mounted on the PCB; and

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the I/O connector, the outside frame, and the contact assembly are cooperatively aligned so as to guide the insertion of the second-level module within the first-level module so as to mate with the contact assembly for 5 electrically coupling the second-level module of with said PCB.

13. The first-level module of claim 12, wherein the contact assembly comprises:

10 a raised shelf having a set of contact fingers electrically coupled to the PCB;
15 at least two side stops; and
an end stop.

14. The first-level module of claim 11, wherein:

15 the I/O interconnect includes an I/O connector mounted on the PCB providing a first partial bottom of the opening; a guide/connector assembly mounted on the PCB having connector fingers and provides a second partial bottom of the opening, rear sides of the opening, and a back stop for the opening;

20 the outside frame provides front sides of opening; and the first-level module has a lid that provides the top of the opening.

15. A method of performing data transfers in a portable computing system, the method comprising:

25 providing a portable computing host having a first slot including an associated first-level expansion interface;

30 inserting a first-level expansion module into the first slot and operatively coupling the first-level expansion module to the first-level expansion interface, the first-level expansion module having a first-level I/O interface and a second slot including an associated second-level expansion interface, the second slot being and positioned to allow insertion of a second-level expansion 35 module into the slot so as to operatively couple the second level expansion module to the second-level interface while the first-level module is inserted in the first slot, and

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to allow withdrawal of the second-level expansion module from the second slot so as to decouple from the second-level expansion interface while the first-level module is inserted in the first slot ;

5 coupling a first external I/O device to the first-level I/O interface;

 inserting a second-level expansion module into the second slot and operatively coupling the second-level expansion module to the second-level expansion interface;

10 performing first data transfers over the first-level expansion interface, the first data transfers being between the portable computing host and the first-level expansion module;

15 performing second data transfers over the first-level I/O interface and between the first-level expansion module and the first external I/O device; and

20 performing third data transfers over the second-level expansion interface, the third data transfers being between the first-level expansion module and the second-level expansion module.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the second-level expansion module includes a second-level I/O interface, the method further comprising:

25 coupling a second external I/O device to the second-level I/O interface; and

 performing fourth data transfer over the second-level I/O interface and between the second-level expansion module and the second external I/O device.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the first external I/O device is a mobile phone, the second-level I/O interface includes a first RF network interface, the second external I/O device includes a second RF network interface, and the fourth data transfer is implemented using an RF network protocol, the method further comprising:

35 coupling the mobile phone to the Internet; and

 coupling the second external I/O device to the Internet via said second, third, and fourth transfers.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein the first external I/O device is a mobile phone and the second-level expansion module includes expansion memory, the method further comprising:

5 coupling the system to the Internet via the mobile phone;

 downloading data from the Internet to the expansion memory of the second-level expansion module.

19. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the 10 second-level module is a Secure Digital module.

20. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the function of the I/O adapter circuitry includes networking.

21. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the 15 first-level module includes application specific circuitry that makes use of the output and input capabilities of the portable host for user interface functions associated with the specific application.

22. The first-level module of claim 21, wherein the first-level module permits the portable host to be 20 customized for use as a media player.

23. The first-level module of claim 1, wherein the function of the I/O adapter circuitry is for connection to a bar-code scanner.

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